JUNE 2025

BBC ON GAZA-ISRAEL:

ONE STORY, DOUBLE STANDARDS

2023-24

CENTRE FOR MEDIA MONITORING

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ABOUT US

CENTRE FOR MEDIA MONITORING

Promoting fair, accurate and responsible journalism about Muslims and Islam through verifiable evidence and constructive engagement.

According to the University of Cambridge, mainstream media reporting about Muslim communities is contributing to an atmosphere of rising hostility towards Muslims in Britain. Sir Alan Moses, the former chair of the newspaper regulator IPSO (Independent Press Standards Organisation) said the portrayal of Islam and Muslims in the British press had been the "most difficult issue" facing the watchdog during his chairmanship and that Muslims are "written about in a way that [newspapers] would simply not write about Jews or Roman Catholics".

CfMM's own evidence, based on monitoring and analysing hundreds of thousands of online, print and television reports, shows that much of the coverage of Muslims and Islam is negative. Far right tropes which used to live in the dark corners of the web only a decade ago have become mainstream. With the arrival of GB News on the broadcast landscape, Islamophobia has been normalised.

Through our evidence base, CfMM's aim is to highlight negative trends in the media as well as promote good practice. We engage constructively with editors, journalists, regulators policy makers. We deliver training to media outlets and community organisations as well as masterclasses to journalism students to ensure that what is reported on Islam and Muslims in the media is fair, accurate and responsible.

MEDIA BIAS GAZA 2023-24
GB NEWS
A Snapshot of Anti-Muslim Hate
CENTRE FOR MEDIA MONITORING SPECIAL REPORT
How The British Media Reports On
TERRORISM
British Media's Coverage of Muslims and Islam (2018-2020)

AVAILABLE ONLINE

REVIEWER COMMENTS

IN SPITE OF THE GENOCIDAL RHETORIC OF THE ISRAELI LEADERSHIP, THE MEDIA PERSISTED IN PROJECTING AN INACCURATE EQUIVALENCE, DISTORTING REALITIES ON THE GROUND.

Husam Zomlot
Ambassador, Palestinian Mission to the United Kingdom

DEVASTATING EVIDENCE BACKED EXPOSÉ OF THE GREATEST JOURNALISTIC SCANDAL OF OUR AGE.

Owen Jones
Columnist & Commentator

I COULD SEE EVERY EDITORIAL FAILURE IN THIS REPORT PLAYING OUT AS IT HAPPENED, AND NOW THE DATA IS UTTERLY CLEAR IN SUPPORTING WHAT I WITNESSED.

Karishma Patel
Former BBC Journalist

MOST MAINSTREAM MEDIA HAVE FAILED IN THEIR MOST BASIC DUTY: THEY HAVE LARGELY MANUFACTURED CONSENT, ENABLING A GENOCIDE IN REAL TIME.

Francesca Albanese
United Nations Special Rapporteur
on the Occupied Palestinian Territories

AT THE LEADERSHIP LEVEL, THERE SEEMS TO BE A BIAS NOT AGAINST ISRAEL BUT IN FAVOUR OF ITS TALKING POINTS AND THE DEFENCE OF ITS ACTIONS.

Alistair Campbell
Writer, Strategist, Presenter 'Rest Is Politics'

THIS IS NO CHERRY-PICKED CRITIQUE. IT IS A COMPREHENSIVE, EVIDENCE-BASED INDICTMENT THAT CANNOT BE IGNORED.

Rt Hon Baroness Sayeeda Warsi PC

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Published by the Centre for Media Monitoring (CfMM), this report examines the BBC's coverage of Israel's war on Gaza primarily between 7 October 2023 and 6 October 2024. For this 12-month window of study, a total of 3,873 articles and 32,092 broadcast segments (TV/radio) were analysed.

It is important to note that CfMM respects and values the BBC as the UK's public service broadcaster as well as the work of many of its journalists in the UK and those operating in the region to cover Israel's current war on Gaza. Unfortunately, due to Israeli censorship, no Western journalists have been allowed to enter Gaza freely. Meanwhile, Palestinian journalists living in and reporting from Gaza have filled the gaps and, in many cases, have been killed while bearing witness. This report has been produced, not to undermine the BBC or its journalists, but to share data-led insights that reveal serious shortcomings and failures. Whilst there have been improvements in certain areas of coverage, we stand by the findings of this report which should be considered when any internal or independent review of the BBC's coverage of Israel Palestine is conducted.

For comparative purposes, this study also analysed 7,748 articles on the Ukraine conflict. Through Large Language Model (LLM) classification, keyword detection and case studies – some of which extend beyond our analysis period into 2025 – we identify systematic patterns that raise serious concerns about the BBC's adherence to its Charter-designated obligations of impartiality.

During our analysis period, 42,010 Palestinians and 1,246 Israelis were killed – a 34:1 ratio that provides crucial context for assessing the balance of the BBC's coverage. As deaths in Gaza now exceed 55,000 people, many of these women and children, we examine whether the BBC has fulfilled its duty to inform the British public about what many describe as a 'livestreamed genocide'. For over a year, the International Court of Justice and International Criminal Court have been investigating Israel and Israeli leaders for genocide and/or other crimes against humanity.

Building on CfMM's 2024 report, 'Media Bias: Gaza 2023-24', we investigate the BBC's treatment of crucial factors including: language used, the disproportionate number of casualties, Palestinian and Israeli voices, Israeli hostages versus the 10,000+ Palestinians detained without charge (many of them children), the systematic destruction of Gaza's civilian infrastructure, and targeted attacks on medical personnel and journalists.

Across the BBC's coverage, a clear dynamic has emerged: the marginalisation of Palestinian suffering and the amplification of Israeli narratives. The data shows that the BBC has consistently failed to report Israel's war on Gaza with required impartiality.

KEY FINDINGS

1. FOR THE BBC, PALESTINIANS DEATHS ARE LESS NEWSWORTHY

The evidence clearly suggests that within the BBC's editorial framework, Palestinian lives simply do not matter equally. In an asymmetric conflict, responsible journalism demands not only neutrality of tone, but rigour in representing the scale and severity of harm – especially to those whose voices are already marginalised in the broader media narrative. The following findings beg the question: does the BBC find Palestinian suffering less newsworthy than Israeli suffering, or is Israeli violence less shocking and newsworthy than Palestinian violence?

- **Israeli names, Israeli faces:** Despite Gaza enduring 34x more deaths than Israel since the start of the war, the BBC ran an almost equal number of articles profiling personal and humanising stories about specific Israeli or Palestinian victims (279 for Palestinians vs. 201 for Israelis).
- **Outpouring of sympathy:** Despite Gaza enduring mass civilian casualties for many months, sympathetic articles with emotive, humanising or personal stories of Palestinians appeared only twice as often as those for Israelis.
- **Palestinian death make fewer headlines:** BBC article headlines mentioned Palestinian casualties just two times more than Israeli casualties, despite 34x more Gazan deaths.
- **Extreme imbalance in reporting fatalities:** The BBC gave Israeli deaths 33 times more coverage across articles, and 19 times more across TV/radio, when measured on a per-fatality basis in proportion to the 34:1 Gazan-Israeli death toll.
- **Delegitimising casualty numbers:** the BBC attached the 'Hamas-run' qualifier (i.e., 'Hamas-run health ministry') to Palestinian casualty figures in 1,155 articles – almost as many times as the Palestinian death toll was mentioned across BBC articles – thereby undermining Gazan casualties and Palestinian suffering, more generally.

2. THE BBC DEPLOYS A HIERARCHY OF LANGUAGE FOR ISRAELIS AND PALESTINIANS

The BBC's use of language appears systematic and varies according to the identity of victims and perpetrators. Linguistic patterns, whether deliberate editorial policy or unconscious bias, fundamentally betray the BBC's commitment to impartiality by constructing a moral universe where Israeli suffering is inherently more tragic, more deliberate, and more worthy of human empathy than Palestinian deaths.

- **'Massacre' applied to attacks against Israelis:** The word 'massacre(d)' was applied almost 18 times more frequently to Israeli victims than Palestinian victims in BBC articles. Meanwhile, it appeared in article headlines five times – all exclusively for attacks on Israelis. Despite numerous mass casualty attacks against Palestinians, the term never appeared in headlines describing Palestinian deaths.
- **More emotive language for Israeli victims:** BBC articles used emotive terms ('atrocities', 'slaughter', 'barbaric', 'deadly', 'brutal') almost four times as much when describing Israeli victims. In TV/radio, 70% of all emotive terms used by BBC correspondents and presenters referred to Israeli victims of attacks.
- **Israelis are 'butchered', Palestinians simply 'die':** The words 'butchered', 'butcher', 'butchering' were used exclusively for Israeli victims by BBC correspondents and presenters. Similarly, 'murder(ed)' was referenced 220 times for actions against Israelis and just once for Palestinians.
- **Masking the perpetrator:** When reporting attacks on Palestinians, the BBC consistently obscured Israeli responsibility through passive language in headlines (e.g., 'Air strike on Gaza school kills at least 15 people' rather than identifying Israel as the perpetrator).

3. INTERVIEWEES WITH INDEPENDENT OR PALESTINIAN PERSPECTIVES ARE NOT TREATED FAIRLY AT THE BBC

Palestinian perspectives face significant barriers to being heard on BBC platforms. These patterns represent a serious departure from the BBC's stated commitment to impartiality, which requires giving 'due weight to events, opinion and the main strands of argument' across its output.

- **Disparity in platforming voices:** The BBC interviewed significantly fewer Palestinians than Israelis (1,085 v 2,350) on TV and radio.
- **'Israeli self-defence':** BBC presenters shared the Israeli perspective 11 times more frequently than the Palestinian perspective (2,340 v 217), even when interviewing neutral third parties like humanitarian organisations.
- **Uneven application of the "do you condemn" test:** While the BBC pressed a total of 38 interviewees to condemn Hamas's 7 October attacks, equivalent questioning to condemn Israel's actions took place zero times, despite Israel's actions resulting in tens of thousands of Palestinian deaths.

4. HISTORY STARTS ON 7 OCTOBER 2023 AT THE BBC

The systematic omission of key historical and contemporary context has acquired an institutional quality at the BBC. Whilst the attacks of 7 October 2023 which led to the killing of over 1,200 Israelis has rightly been condemned, the context given around the attack has been small, if not non-existent, thereby reinforcing the Israeli government's narrative of self-defence.

- **7 October as the 'starting point':** The 7 October attacks were referenced in at least 40% of the BBC's online coverage. Yet only 0.5% of articles referenced any historical or contemporary context, namely: Israel's occupation and violence against Palestinians in the months, years and decades before 7 October, as documented by many organisations, such as the UN and Amnesty International.
- **History erased from reporting:** The BBC only mentioned 'occupation' 14 times in news articles when providing context to 7 October (0.3% of articles); 'blockade' 3 times (0.08%), and 'settlements' just once (0.03%) – while across TV/radio, 'occupation' appeared in only 33 clips (0.3%), 'blockade' in 20 (0.2%), and 'settlements' in 8 (0.07%).
- **Strategic contextual omission:** Despite being essential context for understanding the 7 October attack, Palestinian fatalities of Israeli violence (pre-7 October) appeared in just 1 article (0.03%), references to international law violations in just 1 article (0.03%), and Palestinian expulsions-from-homes in just 1 article (0.03%).
- **Apartheid reality obscured:** Despite numerous human rights organisations identifying Israel's policies as apartheid, only 2% of articles mentioned the term, thereby concealing a crucial framework through which to understand the structural nature of Israel's current war on Gaza and Palestine more generally.
- **Military doctrine blackout:** In its coverage of Gaza, the BBC completely omitted Israeli military doctrines like the Dahiya Doctrine (deliberate targeting of civilian infrastructure) and the Hannibal Directive (risking hostages' lives to prevent captures), despite these being essential for understanding Israeli operations.

5. THE BBC SUPPRESSES OR MINIMISES ALLEGATIONS OF GENOCIDE

The BBC's approach to allegations of genocide against the Palestinians represents perhaps the most profound and egregious failure in its coverage of the Israel-Gaza conflict. Our research has found a systematic pattern of the BBC suppressing claims about a 'plausible genocide' and failing to properly investigate and report on Israeli actions contributing to these claims.

- **Ignoring genocidal intent:** BBC articles made zero mention of Israel's genocidal rhetoric, such as Netanyahu's biblical Amalek reference or President Herzog's claim of Palestinian collective responsibility. The BBC barely acknowledged (in 12 out of 3873 articles) former defence minister Gallant's statement in which he referred to Palestinians as 'human animals' and ordered 'a complete siege on the Gaza strip', stating that: 'We will eliminate everything'.
- **Suppressing genocide claims:** BBC presenters actively shut down interviewees' genocide claims – in over 100 documented instances – despite human rights organisations such as Amnesty International concluding that a genocide is taking place, and legal bodies, such as the ICJ, which not only refused to dismiss South Africa's case that Israel was committing genocide in Gaza but also issued provisional measures to protect Palestinians against the irreparable damage to their rights to be protected from genocide.
- **Downplaying war crimes:** The term 'war crimes' in relation to Israeli violence against Palestinians was mentioned in only 121 BBC articles (3%).

6. ILLEGALLY HELD ISRAELIS AND PALESTINIANS ARE REPRESENTED DIFFERENTLY BY THE BBC

The BBC has established a clear double standard in how it portrays forcibly detained individuals. No Palestinian detainees are referenced as 'hostages', other than one reference by a presenter in 2025, which was swiftly retracted.

- **Contrasting terminology:** Israelis taken by Hamas and other groups into Gaza were consistently described as 'hostages' whilst Palestinians detained by Israel, even those held without charge, were labelled as 'prisoners', thereby implying criminality and reinforcing Israeli government narratives.
- **Extreme disparity in coverage of detainees:** Despite a significantly larger number of Palestinians being detained over a longer period of time (10,000 v 251, a ratio of 40:1), including many more children, Israeli hostages were mentioned 5.3 times more than Palestinian detainees (1238 vs 231).
- **Concealing administrative detention:** Only six BBC articles referenced 'administrative detention', Israel's practice of holding Palestinians without charge, despite it affecting thousands, including hundreds of children.
- **Contrasting human experiences:** During the January 2025 hostage exchanges, 70% of articles focused on Israeli hostages despite 90 Palestinians being released compared to just three Israelis. BBC TV/radio ran emotionally engaging and humanising stories about Israeli hostages returning home, while Palestinian detainees remained nameless, with coverage focusing on procedural aspects rather than personal narratives.

7. THE BBC UNDERREPORTS ATTACKS ON PRESS FREEDOM IN GAZA

The BBC's coverage of Palestinian journalist casualties represents a quantifiable failure to report on attacks on journalists in Palestine compared to other conflict zones.

- **Attacks on Palestinian journalists:** The BBC reported the deaths of just 6% of the 176 journalists killed by the IDF.
- **Comparing attacks on journalists in Ukraine:** Meanwhile, 62% of the journalists killed in the Russia-Ukraine war (and listed by the Committee to Protect Journalists) were reported by the BBC.
- **Failure to hold Israel accountable for press freedom violations:** The BBC routinely obscures Israeli responsibility for journalist deaths through passive language and fails to fact-check demonstrably false Israeli claims about press freedom, applying weaker scrutiny than it would to similar violations by other nations.

8. THE BBC IS MORE WILLING TO COVER THE FULL FACTS IN UKRAINE THAN GAZA

When comparing BBC coverage of Gaza with its reporting on Ukraine, we found significant disparities in attribution, language, and moral framing.

- **Unequal conflict reporting standards:** In articles covering attacks and humanitarian conditions, the BBC privileged Israeli narratives (16.4% of coverage) more than twice as much as Russian perspectives (7.2%), while Ukrainian narratives received higher coverage (40.7%) than Palestinian (32.9%) narratives.
- **Selective justification of military actions:** In articles covering military attacks or humanitarian suffering in Gaza, the BBC provided rationale for Israeli military actions in 75% of articles, compared to 17% for Russian actions in Ukraine. The BBC challenged these Israeli justifications in only 41% of cases, compared to 55% for Russians.
- **Asymmetric reporting of 'war crimes':** The BBC discussed 'war crimes' in Ukraine almost 2.6x as much as in Gaza, mentioning Russia as the perpetrator 2.7x as often as it mentioned Israel as the perpetrator.
- **Sympathy for Ukrainians:** When looking at articles reporting on military attacks or humanitarian impact in Gaza, the BBC published almost twice as many articles showing sympathy (emotive language, humanising details, or personal stories about victims) for Ukrainian victims compared to Palestinians.
- **Coverage disparity:** There are twice the number of articles relating to Ukraine vs Gaza – approximately 10 articles per day for Gaza and 20 per day for Ukraine.

KEY STATISTICS

279 v 201	The BBC ran an almost **equal number of articles with humanising stories** about specific Israeli or Palestinian victims, **despite 34x more Palestinian deaths in Gaza.**
18x	The word **'massacre(d)' was applied almost 18 times** more frequently to Israeli victims than Palestinian victims in BBC articles.
4x	BBC articles used **emotive terms** ('atrocities', 'slaughter', 'barbaric', 'deadly', 'brutal' and others) **almost four times as much when describing Israeli victims.**
70%	In TV/radio, 70% of all emotive terms used by BBC journalists **referred to Israeli victims of attacks.**
33x	The BBC gave **Israeli deaths 33 times more coverage** across articles, when measured on a per-fatality basis.
1,085 v 2,350	The BBC **interviewed significantly fewer Palestinians than Israelis (1,085 v 2,350)** on TV and radio.
11x	BBC **presenters shared the Israeli perspective 11 times more** frequently than the Palestinian perspective (2,340 v 217).
0x	While the BBC pressed a total of 38 interviewees to condemn Hamas's 7 October attacks, equivalent questioning to **condemn Israel's actions** took place zero times.

40% vs 0.5%	While the 7 October attacks were referenced in at least 40% of the BBC's online coverage, just **0.5% of articles referenced Israel's occupation and violence against Palestinians in the months, years and decades before 7 October.**
2%	Despite human rights organisations identifying Israel's policies as **apartheid, only 2% of articles mentioned the term.**
0	BBC articles made zero mention of **Netanyahu's genocidal Amalek reference** or President Herzog's claim of Palestinian collective responsibility.
100 +	BBC presenters actively **shut down guests' genocide claims** in over 100 documented instances.
3%	The term **'war crimes' in relation to Israeli violence** against Palestinians was mentioned in only 121 BBC articles (3%).
5.3x	Despite a significantly larger number of Palestinians being detained over a longer period of time, including many more children, **Israeli hostages were mentioned 5.3 times more than Palestinian detainees (1238 vs 231).**
70%	During the January 2025 hostage exchanges, **70% of articles focused on Israeli hostages despite 90 Palestinians being released** compared to just three Israelis.
6%	The BBC **reported the deaths of just 6% of the 176 journalists killed by the IDF.**
2x	The BBC published almost twice as many **articles showing sympathy (emotive, humanising or personal stories) for Ukrainian victims compared to Palestinians.**

REVIEWER COMMENTS

Husam Zomlot

Ambassador, Palestinian Mission to the United Kingdom

The role of media stands on the frontline of informing and influencing public and policy perspectives. Yet for too long, the mainstream media has systematically obscured and distorted the Palestinian experience from its audiences, projecting a false parity between the occupier and occupied. The full reality of the injustices and oppression faced by the Palestinians never properly conveyed, under the guise of balance and neutrality. For the first time in history the world watched a genocide unfold in real time, and generations to come will rightly question, why it took so long to stop this. In spite of the genocidal rhetoric of the Israeli leadership clearly stating its plans for the erasure of the Palestinian people, the media persisted in projecting an inaccurate equivalence, distorting the realities on the ground. This detailed report by the Centre for Media Monitoring presents compelling evidence that highlights anti Palestinian bias in the media narrative, and puts forward recommendations that are rooted in the principles of fairness, accuracy and integrity.

Francesca Albanese

United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Occupied Palestinian Territories

The global movement rising for justice in Palestine-including Palestinians and the Israelis who stand firmly against the destruction of Gaza and Apartheid-is not challenging Israel's security, but its impunity. Yet most mainstream media have failed in their most basic duty: instead of informing the public and holding power to account, they have largely manufactured consent, enabling a genocide in real time. I look forward to reading this report on the subject.

Rt Hon Baroness Sayeeda Warsi PC

This powerful research by the Centre for Media Monitoring exposes how, during Israel's war on Gaza, the BBC consistently prioritised Israeli pain and perspective - at the expense of Palestinian lives and voices. The BBC should have done better in questioning Israeli talking points and in holding our own government to account for its lack of implementation of UK policy on Israel and Palestine. As a public service broadcaster, it has not read the mood of the public either. This is no cherry-picked critique. It is a comprehensive, evidence-based indictment that cannot be ignored. If the BBC is to maintain any claim to impartiality, it must now engage seriously with these findings and the recommendations that follow.

Alistair Campbell

Writer, Strategist, Presenter 'Rest Is Politics'

All too often, on domestic issues, the BBC's response to criticism from the right is to accept rather than challenge it and adapt coverage accordingly. This is perhaps best understood in the context of the incessant drumbeat of anti-BBC sentiment in a commercially and politically motivated right-wing press. But we see the same pattern in some of its approach to international issues too, notably Israel and Palestine. The Israelis and the right-wing media do a very good job of persuading people that the BBC is biased in favour of Palestinians. This report suggests otherwise. The criticisms it contains should not detract from our admiration and respect for some of the excellent reporters who do their best to bring the story to BBC viewers and listeners, despite not being allowed into Gaza. But at the leadership level, there seems to be a bias not against Israel but in favour of its talking points and the defence of its actions. And it remains a scandal that a BBC commissioned film on the Israeli destruction of Gaza health facilities has yet to be aired.

Karishma Patel
Former BBC Journalist

This report is crucial, providing data driven insights into the BBC's reporting on Gaza which corroborate editorial failures I witnessed myself as a BBC journalist covering Gaza during this time period. Key findings - such as Palestinian deaths being deemed less newsworthy, or the disparity in language used to speak about Israeli and Palestinian deaths - were identified and deeply felt by various BBC journalists during this period. I could see every editorial failure in this report playing out as it happened, and now the data is utterly clear in supporting what I witnessed. The BBC has failed to uphold its own editorial standards in covering Gaza, and it must urgently implement this report's recommendations.

Owen Jones
Columnist & Commentator

This devastatingly comprehensive research proves that the critique of the BBC's reporting of Israel's genocide is based on facts, not suppositions. This was never about trying to get the BBC to bow to the ideological demands of activists - it was about the Corporation abiding by its own commitment to due impartiality. The dehumanisation of Palestinians, the deference to Israel's deceitful narratives, the airbrushing of Western-facilitated war crimes: none of these are unique to the BBC, and is part and parcel of the worst scandal of Western journalism of our age. But this is a public service broadcaster, and its global reach has helped consolidate a narrative which erases the reality of the genocide. This crucial study will add to growing pressure on the BBC to do what many of its own staff are demanding of it - which is to do accurate journalism. The truth is that Israel's Western-facilitated genocide would never have been possible if media outlets like the BBC had done their job - and underlines how bad journalism costs lives.

Peter Oborne
Journalist & Author

This thorough and fair-minded report documents beyond reasonable doubt that the BBC has failed professionally and morally in its reporting from Gaza. It has dehumanised Palestinians, failed to challenge Israeli lies, and generally constructed a framework where Israeli suffering is more newsworthy and tragic than Palestinian. Something clearly went terribly wrong at the BBC. This massive and damning analysis from the Centre for Media Monitoring demands urgent and detailed answers from the BBC's management which has clearly failed its statutory duty to provide fair and impartial reporting. It is essential that it does so if it wishes to sustain its once mighty reputation for fairness and integrity.

Richard Gizbert
Presenter and Creator, 'The Listening Post', Al Jazeera

This is a vitally important study. It documents, quantifies and reinforces what anyone who has been tracking the BBC's coverage of Gaza has already concluded; that its journalism is indefensibly biased and one-sided in Israel's favour. How, after all the images we have seen on our phones, could any network executive justify the fact that only 3% of the BBC's articles on Gaza dare to use the term 'war crimes'? One day, the BBC will have to answer for abandoning its principles and betraying its audiences over its coverage of Gaza. When that time comes, studies like the CfMM's will be entered into the evidence.

Sacha Deshmukh
Chief Executive, Amnesty International UK.

It has arguably never been more important that media here in the UK, and globally, are able to report objectively and impartially on human rights crises around the world, but also that reputable media organisations are clear in their responsibility to avoid bias, and never to apply double standards in their reporting of different countries or communities. Any bias in the media not only affects news reporting, but it also magnifies as it echoes into broader public debate and even the decision making of policy makers at the most senior level. High quality empirical analysis of media coverage can be critical to holding the media itself to account, so that media leaders deliver to their promises of impartiality and can maintain public confidence in our most valued media institutions.

INTRODUCTION

The BBC, as our national public service broadcaster and one of the world's leading international news outlets, has found itself navigating increasingly turbulent waters in its coverage of Israel's war on Gaza since Hamas's October 7 attack. In our analysis of broader media coverage of Israel's current military operation published in our report, 'Media Bias: Gaza 2023-24' in January 2024,[1] we revealed specific patterns in the British media's (and the BBC's) reporting that raised serious concerns about impartiality. Previous research has shown the BBC's linguistic choices showing a marked disparity.

Well documented examples show passive language used to describe Palestinian victims with more emotive terms reserved for Israelis who have been killed or injured. In other examples, we found Israeli spokespersons and their surrogates allowed to make false claims about their military operations with little scrutiny, while Palestinian voices or those articulating their perspectives were routinely asked to condemn Hamas as an entry to take part in discussions, even though they have no connection to the organisation.[2]

Since then, over 50,000 Palestinians have been killed by the Israeli military. Thousands more have been forcibly displaced and, as we write, face an ever growing and widespread state of starvation. How has the BBC fared in reporting what is now widely described as the **'livestreamed genocide'** as well as other face-value atrocities? We have extended our analysis as the editorial challenges identified in our 2024 report have not only persisted but deepened in their impact on BBC coverage.

This report primarily examines the BBC's coverage from 6 October 2023 to 7 October 2024, analysing 32,092 broadcast segments and 3,873 articles through a Large Language Model classifier. For comparative purposes, we also analysed 7,748 articles on the Ukraine conflict from its first year (24 February 2022 to 23 February 2023). Our methodology employs natural language processing to systematically identify patterns of representation across this extensive dataset. We supplemented this quantitative analysis with qualitative case studies extending into 2025, particularly examining the ceasefire exchanges and ongoing coverage patterns.

The scale of our analysis – covering a full year of the BBC's output across multiple platforms – allows us to move beyond anecdotal observations to demonstrate systematic patterns in editorial choices. We find a pattern of omission that has acquired an institutional quality at the corporation.

Our Dataset

- **3,873 articles** relating to the war in Gaza from 7 Oct 2023 to 6 Oct 2024
- **7,748 articles** relating to the war in Ukraine from 24 Feb 2022 to 23 Feb 2023
- **32,092 broadcast** segments relating to the war in Gaza from 7 Oct 2023 to 6 Oct 2024

1 Media Bias Gaza 2023-24, Centre for Media Monitoring, January 2024, p. 61
2 Ibid. p.114

We examine eight critical areas of BBC coverage.

1: **Whose lives matter?** examines how reporting of fatalities on all sides are dealt with in an even-handed fashion. Is there any difference in the depiction of Palestinian and Israeli victims? Given the extensive coverage of 7 October 2023, and the sympathetic nature of the impact of these attacks, would the BBC have reported this war differently if it was Israelis, and not Palestinians, being killed in the order of 50,000+?

2: **The BBC's asymmetric language of violence** assesses linguistic choices made by the BBC in reporting this conflict, identifying differences in the language used for actions by Israelis and Palestinians.

3: **Who speaks?** monitors if there are significant differences in how Israeli and Palestinians representatives are treated across the BBC.

4: **Telling the full story** looks at to what extent the BBC has used a fair degree of context including historical context in its coverage of 7 October and the events since then, especially as the Israeli government presents that fateful day as 'ground zero' for this current conflict.

5: **Downplaying Genocide and war crimes** examines how the BBC covered the events and the legal assessments that view that Israel may be committing genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes.

6: **Hostages versus 'prisoners'** assesses how the BBC covers the reporting of Israelis taken largely on 7 October and Palestinians held in their thousands prior to and since 7 October.

7: **Killing journalists and censorship** investigates the BBC's coverage of attacks on media workers in what has been described as the deadliest conflict for journalists in recorded history.

8: **Two-tier reporting** compares to the Russia-Ukraine conflict, and assesses whether the same actions receive different treatment depending on the perpetrator of the violence.

The BBC operates under explicit obligations to provide impartial coverage. Its Royal Charter requires the corporation to 'provide impartial news and information to help people understand and engage with the world around them.'[3] The BBC's own Editorial Guidelines state unambiguously that impartiality requires giving 'due weight to events, opinion and the main strands of argument' and ensuring 'a wide range of significant views and perspectives are given due weight and prominence.'[4]

In asymmetric conflicts where civilian casualties differ dramatically — as in Gaza, where Palestinian deaths exceed Israeli deaths by 34:1 — proportional representation becomes a question of editorial accuracy rather than advocacy. This report applies proportionality not as mechanical equivalence, but as one measure of whether the BBC has fulfilled its obligation to give 'due weight' to the scale of human suffering. We acknowledge that breaking news cycles, source accessibility, and audience proximity influence coverage decisions. However, consistent patterns maintained across 12 months and 43,713 pieces of content suggest systematic editorial choices rather than temporary circumstances.

This report explores how the BBC has covered the issue of Palestine, based on its Charter obligations and editorial standards, and to what extent it has achieved this. Given the considerable amount of coverage over an entire year, the research is able to highlight various trends in the overall output, acknowledging that the quality of some reports may be higher than others, that some have been excellent but others that have failed to meet the standards the BBC guidelines set out.

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3 BBC Royal Charter, Article 6(1): Mission, Public Purposes and Functions of the BBC, 2017 https://downloads.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/assets/files/pdf/about/how_we_govern/2016/charter.pdf

4 BBC Editorial Guidelines, Section 4: Impartiality, https://www.bbc.co.uk/editorialguidelines/guidelines/impartiality

METHODOLOGY SUMMARY

This study analysed how the BBC covered Israel's war on Gaza: focusing on objectivity and consistency primarily through the use of advanced artificial intelligence (AI). Rather than relying solely on human interpretation — which can be subjective and difficult to scale — we used a state-of-the-art Large Language Model (LLM) to examine thousands of BBC articles and broadcast transcripts across a one-year period for each conflict. The study also deployed desk research and other methods of key word and key phrase detection.

Data Collection and Preparation

We collected a comprehensive set of BBC content, including both written articles from the BBC's English-language website and broadcast material from key BBC TV and radio channels. For the Israel-Gaza war, we focused on October 2023 to October 2024. For the Ukraine-Russia war, we focused on February 2022 to February 2023. To ensure relevance, we used carefully chosen search terms related to each conflict, and took steps to remove duplicates and exclude very short or incomplete pieces that might distort the analysis.

In total, the final dataset comprised 3,873 articles and 32,092 broadcast clips relating to the Israel-Gaza war, and 7,748 articles on the Ukraine-Russia war.

Structuring and Analysing the Content

A key challenge in analysing broadcast transcripts is identifying who is speaking and what type of content is being presented (for example, interviews versus regular news reporting). To address this, we used AI to process the transcripts, label speakers, and structure the content. We excluded group panel discussions, where clear speaker identification is not possible.

For both written articles and broadcast materials, our AI model followed a set of objective rules to analyse content. For example, when assessing whether coverage was sympathetic towards victims, the model looked for specific evidence, such as personal stories or the use of emotive language, rather than making subjective judgements.

Quality Assurance and Human Oversight

To ensure reliability, all key AI-generated classifications were reviewed by human experts, who sampled and cross-checked the AI's decisions to confirm accuracy and consistency. Statistical validation methods were also applied where appropriate, ensuring that agreement between AI and human assessments met rigorous benchmarks for reliability. For each analysis, we ensured there was human validation, to ensure the prompt was appropriately identifying what we intended, and to ensure the quality of the output. Agreement between model and human ratings ranged from 90% to 100%

Limitations

Some limitations should be noted. The analysis did not include very short or non-English articles, live blog pages, or short broadcast clips, and group panel discussions were excluded from broadcast analysis. In addition, while automated analysis can present challenges in capturing every nuance or subtlety, our robust framework — combined with thorough human validation — ensured that these methodological limitations were effectively managed and did not materially impact the reliability of the findings.

By combining AI's capacity for large-scale, consistent analysis with human oversight, this methodology provides a robust and transparent foundation for understanding patterns in BBC conflict coverage. A more thorough explanation of our methodology is found at the end of this report.

1. WHOSE LIVES MATTER?

Key Findings

- **Israeli names, Israeli faces: Despite Gaza enduring 34x more deaths than Israel** since the start of the war, the BBC ran an almost **equal number of articles** profiling personal and humanising stories about specific Israeli or Palestinian victims (**279 for Palestinians vs. 201 for Israelis**).
- **Palestinian deaths make fewer headlines:** BBC article *headlines* mentioned **Palestinian casualties just two times more** than Israeli casualties, **despite 34x more Gazan deaths.**
- **Extreme imbalance in reporting fatalities**: **The BBC gave Israeli deaths 33 times more coverage** across articles, and **19 times more** across TV/radio, when measured on a **per-fatality** basis in proportion to the **34:1 Gazan-Israeli death toll.**
- **Delegitimising casualty numbers**: the BBC attached the **'Hamas-run' qualifier** to Palestinian casualty figures in **1,155 articles** – almost as many times as the Palestinian death toll was mentioned across BBC articles – thereby **undermining Gazan casualties and Palestinian suffering**, more generally.

The BBC, as Britain's public service broadcaster, has a responsibility enshrined in its Editorial Guidelines to report with 'due impartiality.' When reporting on casualties and victims, this would mean providing coverage that treats all human life with equal dignity and worth.

The attacks on 7 October 2023, and the subsequent military retribution in Gaza and beyond has resulted in devastating human costs. Both Israelis and Palestinians were killed – men, women and children. Yet the death toll in Gaza – where hospitals, homes, schools and places of worship have also been reduced to rubble – far exceeds Israel's losses.

By October 2024, there were a total of 42,010 Palestinian and 1,246 Israeli casualties. These figures, drawn from Gazan authorities, UN agencies and the Israeli military, provide a baseline against which we can measure the BBC's coverage. We are using these conservative figures for the purposes of this report, although we acknowledge countless independent studies[5] – including the Lancet – that put the Palestinian death toll at a far higher number.

5 Traumatic injury mortality in the Gaza Strip from Oct 7, 2023, to June 30, 2024: a capture–recapture analysis, Jamaluddine, Zeina et al, *The Lancet,* Volume 405, Issue 10477, pp. 469-477

There have been concerted attempts by Israeli officials and their supporters to dismiss these statistics, claiming that they do not account for the number of combatants killed by Israel. However, Israeli authorities decline to proffer any evidence-based counter figures themselves, while also barring independent observers from entering Gaza to verify the death count. The BBC itself explores this in a BBC Verify article from February 2024,[6] examining the IDF's claim at the time that a third of Gazans killed by February 2024 were Hamas fighters. The BBC repeatedly asked the IDF for the details of its methodology for counting Hamas fighter deaths but received no response.

In order to understand how frequently each Palestinian death was mentioned in comparison to each Israeli death, this study[7] analysed BBC articles across the following three areas:

1. **Headlines:** when there is limited space and highest prominence, whose deaths are mentioned more?
2. **First five sentences of articles:** did the article make cursory mentions of the Palestinian or Israeli deaths at the end of an article?
3. **Entire articles:** from start to end, did the article make any mention of Palestinian or Israeli deaths?

Broadcast clips were analysed in the following way:

4. **Clips on broadcast:** to what extent did BBC personnel (presenters and/or reporters) mention casualties in a non-interview setting, thereby focusing on the BBC's own position (rather than in interviews which would include interviewees and routine questions).

We found that across each of the four categories, Israeli casualties featured significantly more prominently. Casualties here are defined as war-related deaths of Israelis in Israel/Palestinians in Palestine.

6 Israel Gaza: Checking Israel's claim to have killed 10,000 Hamas fighters, 29 February 2024, BBC News, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-68387864

7 See Core Methodology

Table 1: Israeli and Palestinian Casualty Mentions Per Death in BBC Coverage.[8]

Type of coverage	Number of mentions of Israeli deaths	Number of mentions of Palestinian deaths	(A) Number of mentions of Israeli deaths per actual death (1,246)	(B) Number of mentions of Palestinian deaths per actual death (42,010)	Ratio of Israeli mentions per death vs Palestinian mentions per death: (A)/(B)
1. Headlines	58	119	0.047	0.003	16
2. First five sentences of articles	304	341	0.244	0.008	30
3. Entire articles	1,303	1,342	1.046	0.032	33
4. Clips on broadcast where BBC personnel mentioned casualties in a non-interview setting	4,405	7,892	3.535	0.188	19

In summary, the frequency of casualty mentions across BBC coverage is significantly higher per Israeli death than per Palestinian death, more specifically: 16 times more frequent across headlines, 30 times more frequent across the first five sentences, 33 times more frequent across full articles, and 19 times more frequent across broadcast clips in non-interview settings.

Taken as absolute figures, or in proportion to the death count, this research suggests that the BBC places a significantly greater value and weight on Israeli deaths than Palestinian deaths. While it would be unrealistic to expect BBC articles and clips to mention Palestinian casualties as many times as the Palestinian death toll itself (42,010 times), this analysis raises an important question: why does the BBC give so much prominence to Israel's comparatively small number of victims? Does the BBC find Palestinian lives and deaths less newsworthy than Israeli ones, or Israeli atrocities less outrageous than Palestinian ones?

8 See Appendix 2: LLM Classification Methodology #1-4, all subsequent references to the data in the table are explained here.

Photo credit: Palestinian Red Crescent Society

Across most of the BBC's coverage, this study finds that the BBC also consistently attached the 'Hamas-run' qualifier to Palestinian casualty figures, casting doubt on the statistics while failing to mention that Israel has barred international observers from entering Gaza and providing third-party verification of the death count. As we explore later in the report, we find that the BBC often reported Palestinian deaths with passive language that often obscured both responsibility and humanity, while using terms like 'massacre' were reserved exclusively for Israeli victims.

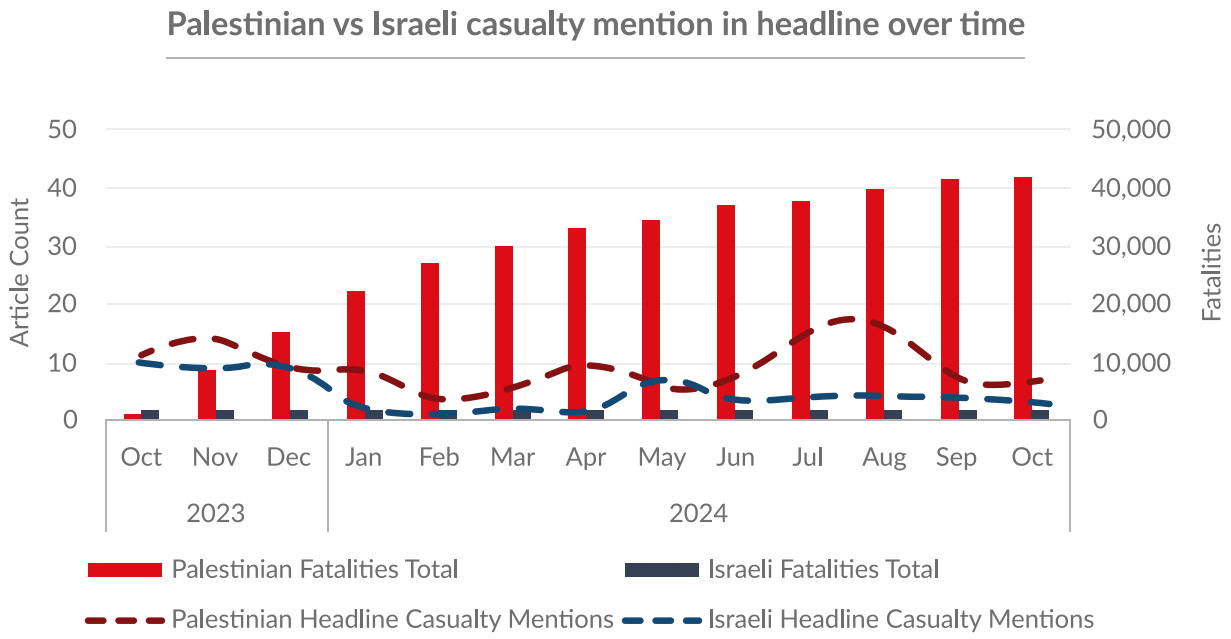
Collectively, such patterns represent a structural failure at the BBC that has left British audiences with a fundamentally distorted understanding of the scale, impact, and responsibility of Israel in this war.

Uneven casualty reporting despite mounting Palestinian deaths

In BBC article headlines, Palestinian casualties (119) were mentioned only twice as often as Israeli casualties (58) – despite the fact that Gazans suffered 34 times more fatalities than Israelis.

This equates to one BBC headline mentioning Palestinian casualties for every 353 Palestinian deaths, versus one BBC headline mentioning Israeli casualties for every 21 Israeli deaths.

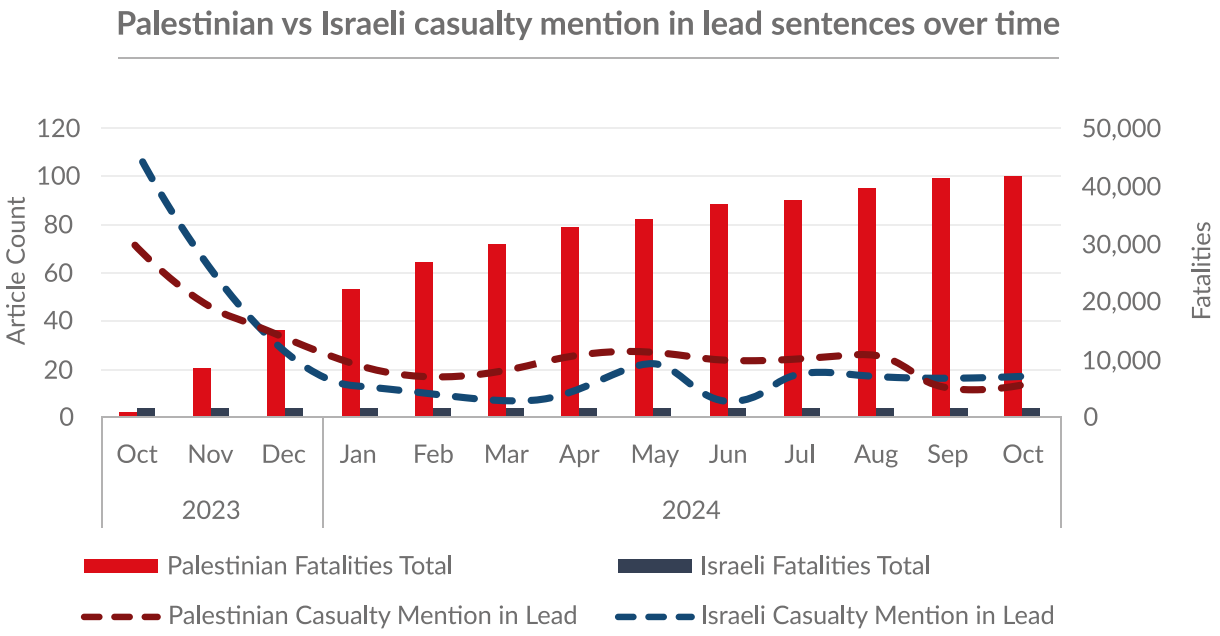
Graph 1



As Israel's war on Gaza intensified following the 7 October attacks, Palestinian casualties rapidly eclipsed Israeli casualties at an alarming rate and have only continued to accelerate. This dramatic disparity created a profound challenge for balanced reporting. While the BBC's initial coverage focused heavily on Israeli victims, the subsequent mass killing of Palestinians by the IDF grew exponentially, but did not receive the same kind of humanising reporting, such as "name and face" stories that profiled specific victims. Taken on balance, the figures suggest a pattern that left the reader without a true picture of the scale and suffering taking place in Gaza.

Whilst headlines are what most people read, an analysis of the lead sentences of these news articles revealed a similar pattern. In the first five sentences of articles, Palestinian casualties were mentioned only 1.1 times more frequently – 341 articles vs. 304 articles.

Graph 2



The investigation also looked at the full news story, rather than just the headlines or first few sentences, to see if the trend persisted.

Within the main body of news articles, Palestinian casualties were mentioned in a similar number of articles (1,342) compared to Israeli casualties (1,303), despite the large disparity in casualty numbers.

This means there were 1.05 articles per Israeli casualty, and 0.03 articles per Palestinian casualty. In other words, this analysis of the full articles, reveals that the BBC mentioned Israeli casualties 33 times more per Israeli death in comparison to Palestinian casualties per Palestinian death. It also means that the BBC published more articles wherein Israeli casualties were mentioned (1,303) than the number of Israelis killed in the 7 October attack (1,246).

This analysis of BBC news articles shows that Palestinian deaths received significantly less coverage at every level. From headlines to lead paragraphs to full articles – the coverage remained vastly disproportionate relative to Gaza's comparatively enormous death toll.

However, articles only form part of the overall BBC coverage, which is why this research also examined the BBC's broadcast coverage.

Across 23,618 clips analysed, there were 7,892 mentions of Palestinian casualties compared to 4,405 mentions of Israeli casualties. In other words, for every Israeli casualty there were 3 mentions, but for every Palestinian fatality there were just 0.2 mentions.

Based on this analysis of BBC broadcast coverage, the BBC gave 19 times more weight to Israeli deaths than Palestinian ones.

The stories behind the numbers

As this analysis covers an entire year, making it difficult to list all the examples, we present here specific instances to illustrate how the BBC appears to be valuing Palestinian lives significantly less than Israeli lives.

In the immediate aftermath of 7 October, the BBC's focus on Israeli victims was understandable. As news emerged about the scale of the attack with unconfirmed Israeli casualty figures, we see headlines such as 'PM says Israel at war after 250 killed in attack from Gaza' with the lead paragraph stating 'At least 250 people are reported killed and 1,590 wounded in Israel after the Palestinian militant group Hamas launched its biggest attack in years.'[9]

Another BBC online article on 10 October is headlined 'Inside Kfar Aza where Hamas militants killed families in their homes' with the reporter saying how soldiers who 'spent much of the day in the ruins recovering bodies of civilians said that there had been a massacre'.[10] Despite Israel's subsequent attacks on Gaza claiming Palestinian lives almost immediately, reports of Palestinians being killed only appear in headlines from 12 October: 'Bodies line corridors as Gaza hospital warns it's at breaking point' with the lead paragraph stating 'The hallways and courtyards are filled with hundreds of bodies, as the morgue's refrigerators cannot hold them all'.[11]

It is worth noting from the above articles that the active voice in the former one proactively attributes deaths of civilians to Hamas while no perpetrator is named in the latter, and Palestinians are referred to only as inanimate 'bodies' not even humanised.

9 Israel attack: PM says Israel at war after 250 killed in attack from Gaza, BBC News, 7 October 2023 https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-67036625

10 Inside Kfar Aza where Hamas militants killed families in their homes, BBC News, 10 October 2023, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-67065205

11 Bodies line corridors as Gaza hospital warns it's at breaking point, BBC News, 12 October 2023, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-67095483

Within the first week the BBC published 137 articles out of which eight headlines personalised Israeli casualties.

These included heartfelt accounts, such as '"Dad. They shot me. Help": Surviving the Kfar Aza kibbutz massacre'[12] and 'My daughter's final moments as Hamas invaded her home'.[13] The headlines featured specific locations like the Kfar Aza kibbutz and personal narratives of survival and loss. Other headlines highlighted individual tragedies, such as 'Missing peace activist Vivian Silver - son awaits news, good or bad'[14] and 'Hamas hostages: "The terrorists have her and her babies"'.[15]

BBC NEWS
Missing peace activist Vivian Silver - son awaits news, good or bad
13 October 2023
03:30
Watch: Yonatan Ziegen's mother Vivian Silver texted her son to say her home had been attacked

Similarly, in broadcasts, a reporter emotively retold how one person found out about a friend who was 'one of the more than 250 massacred that morning at the music festival'.[16] We examine the use of the word by BBC reporters to describe attacks against Israelis rather than Palestinians in Section Two.

12 'Dad. They shot me. Help': Surviving the Kfar Aza kibbutz massacre, BBC News, 13 October 2023, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-67089114

13 My daughter's final moments as Hamas invaded her home, BBC News, 11 October 2023, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/world-us-canada-67074046

14 Missing peace activist Vivian Silver - son awaits news, good or bad, BBC News, 13 October 2023 https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-67090491

15 Hamas hostages: 'The terrorists have her and her babies'", BBC News, 10 October 2023, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-67064742

16 BBC World Service, 10 October 2023, 09:49 BST

Of the few Palestinian experiences relayed in those first few weeks, there were headlines such as 'Palestinian American: "I wake up and check if my family in Gaza is still alive"'[17] and 'Gaza: "I wish I could be a normal child living with no war"'.[18] The BBC published five such headlines compared to the eight Israeli victim headlines in the same period.[19]

BBC NEWS
Hamas hostages: 'The terrorists have her and her babies'
TELEGRAM
Shiri and her two young children being taken away by Hamas militants

The disparity in the sheer scale of coverage becomes apparent as the Palestinian death toll quickly outstrips that of the Israelis killed within weeks of 7 October. By November 2023, the Israeli army had attacked several civilian infrastructure sites as well as homes.

The BBC's reporting of the IDF's attack on the Al-Shifa Hospital on 15 November 2023 illustrates omission of Palestinian casualty figures. The article mentions the humanitarian crisis caused by the Israeli offensive, stating that: 'Israel's Army Radio reported that troops had not yet found any sign of any of the 240 hostages taken by Hamas during the 7 October attack on Israel, when 1,200 other people were killed.'[20] However, it fails to mention how many Palestinian civilians were killed in the raid or the death toll from Israel's attacks by that point (11,000 plus[21]).

A viewer complained of the BBC's broadcast coverage of this incident a few days earlier, arguing that it 'allowed Israel to 'frame events' concerning fighting around the Al-Shifa hospital in such a way that the coverage offered on the subject was 'biased, distorted and misleadin'. The BBC rejected the complaint.[22]

17 Palestinian American: 'I wake up and check if my family in Gaza is still alive'", BBC News, 13 October 2023 https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-67096634

18 Gaza: "I wish I could be a normal child living with no war", BBC News, 9 October 2023 https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/world-middle-east-67058592

19 Conducted through a manual search of BBC articles.

20 Al-Shifa: What we know about Israel's raid on Gaza's main hospital, BBC News, 15 November 2023 https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-67424064

21 Hostilities in the Gaza Strip and Israel | Flash Update #41, UNOCHA, 17 November 2023 https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/hostilities-gaza-strip-and-israel-flash-update-41

22 News (1pm), Radio 4, 11 November 2023, BBC Executive Complaints Unit, 18 January 2024, https://www.bbc.co.uk/contact/ecu/news-1pm-radio-4-11-november-2023

Six months later, a piece[23] about Israel's Remembrance Day on 13 May 2024, gives personal testimony from the families of fallen Israeli soldiers, with one saying: '25,000 soldiers have lost their lives since the establishment of the State of Israel'. It does not reveal how many Palestinians have been killed since the establishment of the State of Israel (more than 100,000, according to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics) let alone the death toll since 7 October 2023.

This disparity was not the exception to the rule: for example, in December 2024, an article[24] reporting on ceasefire negotiations (outside our analysis period), reminded readers that '1,200 [Israelis] were killed and 251 others abducted' – the readers were not, meanwhile, told of the 45,000 plus Palestinians killed,[25] nor the amount held under illegal detention.

As we have shown above, despite the number of Palestinians killed rising month after month, the number of BBC articles and broadcast clips mentioning Palestinian casualties failed to catch up. This pattern persisted during periods of intense bombing and significant Palestinian civilian fatalities, such as during the Rafah offensive in February 2024.

The imbalance in victim representation

Articles showing sympathy for Palestinian suffering appeared only twice as frequently as those for Israelis (665 v 325), despite Palestinians experiencing the overwhelming majority of attacks and displacement.[26]

Our criteria for victim sympathy require presence of emotive language, personalised descriptions, humanising details, or emotional portrayals of victims, as opposed to clinical, detached, or impersonal casualty reporting.

Within articles displaying victim sympathy, BBC's personal profiling of victims showed near-equal coverage — 279 Palestinians versus 201 Israelis — bearing little relation to the 34-to-1 actual casualty ratio or the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza.[27]

Our criteria for personal profile coverage require substantial personal portrayal of at least one named victim, including family relationships, personal narratives, testimonials, or distinctive details beyond collective references.

This is reflected in broadcast media as well, and has drawn concerns from viewers. In a rejected complaint, one viewer highlighted that there were 'personal details about Israeli hostages, with the intention of humanising them in a manner which contrasted with the BBC's reporting on Palestinian victims of the conflict.' The BBC dismissed the claim saying, 'due impartiality did not require precise equivalence of coverage on the Palestinian side.' Its Executive Complaints Unit noted that 'the BBC had covered stories of Palestinian suffering on other occasions.' It claimed that the BBC reminded audiences of the experiences of individuals on both sides of the conflict and helped explain what was happening and what it meant, on a personal level and to the region more widely.'[28]

Yet, the data and case studies presented below suggest otherwise: the BBC's efforts to represent both sides' victims with similar amounts of coverage have grossly distorted the stark reality of the disproportionate Palestinian suffering at the hands of the Israeli military.

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23 Gaza war weighs heavily as Israel marks memorial day, BBC News, 13 May 2024, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-69004356

24 Gaza ceasefire talks 90% complete, Palestinian official tells BBC, BBC News, 21 December 2024 https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cgq1l5kv2npo

25 Humanitarian Situation Update #249 | Gaza Strip, UNOCHA, 24 December 2024, https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/humanitarian-situation-update-249-gaza-strip

26 See Appendix 2: LLM Classification Methodology #5

27 See Appendix 2: LLM Classification Methodology #6

28 The Context, BBC News Channel, 24 November 2023, BBC Executive Complaints Unit, 23 May 2024, https://www.bbc.co.uk/contact/ecu/the-context-bbc-news-channel-24-november-2023

Israeli victims

The qualitative difference in how victims are portrayed becomes evident when examining specific articles.

Israeli victim profiles often feature:

1. Full names and identities
2. Rich personal histories and character descriptions
3. Extensive family testimonials with emotional quotes
4. Direct attribution of responsibility to Hamas
5. Clear framing of victims as innocent civilians

Below are a series of examples of how Israeli victims are humanised.

- In 'Family of Scottish Hamas victim are "missing a great man"',[29] Bernard Cowen is memorialised respectfully through heartfelt family quotes like "Bernard loved his life" and "Bernard will never be forgotten, he will always be a part of my heart." The article explicitly identifies Hamas as the perpetrator. The care that has gone into this sensitively written article should be the standard for profiling victims across the board.

- Similarly, coverage of Elyakim Libman[30] includes family testimonials highlighting his heroism: 'His family said he stayed behind for hours treating other wounded people.' The article directly attributes his death to the 'Hamas attack of October 7'.

29 Family of Scottish Hamas victim are 'missing a great man', BBC News, 7 October 2024, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c05g0q3nvz6o

30 Elyakim Libman: Remains of man thought to be Hamas hostage found in Israel, BBC News, 3 May 2024, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-68953413

BBC NEWS

Maidenhead family 'devastated' by uncle's death in Hamas attack

Israel-Gaza war

- In 'Maidenhead family "devastated" by uncle's death in Hamas attack',[31] David Karol is remembered through emotional quotes: 'He was a larger than life character, who had the ability to make us all laugh.' Again, Hamas is directly identified as responsible.
- When covering Yosef Guedalia, a British-Israeli killed during the Hamas attack,[32] the BBC includes multiple testimonials from immediate family members: 'He acted with heroism and determination,' 'always happy, there was no bad in him', and 'That's the hero we had for 22 years.'
- Even in coverage of natural deaths, as with 'Mother of rescued Israeli hostage Noa Argamani dies',[33] the focus rightly and movingly remains on the broader hostage narrative with personal quotes like 'As an only child to my parents, and a mother suffering from a terminal illness, my biggest concern in captivity was for my parents.'
- Yonatan Rapoport was killed on the 7 October 2023 attacks at the Be'eri Kibbutz. The BBC profiled the victim on 19 October 2023[34] and was part of a compiled list of British victims of the 7 October attacks in November.[35] The headline to his dedicated profile makes it quite clear that he was 'murdered' by Hamas, with the report detailing how he was killed alongside tributes from family, friends and peers.

These personal profiles, often repeated, together with emotional testimony and descriptions are crucial to reporting the human cost of this war. This is valid journalism. The issue of critics has been that Palestinian victims have not been covered in the same fashion.

31 Maidenhead family "devastated" by uncle's death in Hamas attack', BBC News, 9 November 2023, https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-berkshire-67344415

32 British-Israeli killed by Hamas, family says, BBC News, 23 October 2023, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-67195174

33 Mother of rescued Israeli hostage Noa Argamani dies, BBC News, 2 July 2024, https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cxw2nmyjdnro

34 Tributes for 'brave' British-Israeli father murdered in Hamas attack, BBC News, 19 October 2023 https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-67157564

35 The UK nationals killed in Hamas attacks on Israel, BBC News, 1 November 2023 https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-67120546

Palestinian victims

The research examines many articles covering Palestinian victims. In sharp contrast to Israeli victims, Palestinian victims are humanised and commemorated sparsely and selectively.

Palestinian victim profiles often:

1. Focus on circumstances rather than the individual's life and character
2. Provide fewer family testimonials or present them with less emotional depth
3. Use passive language regarding responsibility for deaths
4. Include qualifications or disputes about the circumstances of death (though there are occasions when this happens with Israeli victims as well, with regards to whether hostages are killed accidentally by the Israelis).

Below are a few examples of how Palestinian victims are reported on:

- Even when Palestinian victims receive more detailed coverage, as in 'West Bank violence: "My child's destiny was to get killed"',[36] the attribution of responsibility is often qualified. While family testimony identifies the IDF as responsible, the article notes that the IDF disputes this account, creating ambiguity around responsibility that is rarely present in coverage of Israeli victims.

- Some articles are opaque about the cause of personal Palestinian suffering, for example 'Giving birth in Gaza amid shelling and power cuts'.[37] It features Jumana Emad who says 'I was scared. I was in labour among continuous shelling' and also identifies that the Israelis ordered the interviewee out of her home. Yet, it does not state explicitly who was responsible for 'power outages, internet interruptions and water shortages.'

- Even in the few examples where we see a sympathetic portrayal of Palestinian victims, such as BBC's profile of Ashraf El Attar[38] whose entire family was killed in an Israeli airstrike in 2024, the article concludes by pivoting to Israel's defence and justification. The piece signs off with the standard context of the 7 October attack. It cites Gaza's massive death toll while using the 'Hamas-run' qualifier when referencing fatality figures. The Hamas-run prefix also appears in an otherwise sensitively written piece profiling nine victims in November 2023.[39]

The BBC's failure to profile Palestinian casualties can be reviewed in its coverage of three well-known victims.

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36 West Bank violence: "My child's destiny was to get killed", BBC News, 8 March 2024, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-68514581

37 Giving birth in Gaza amid shelling and power cuts, BBC, 27 October 2023, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-67226957

38 Gaza nurse says whole family, including quadruplets, killed in air strike, BBC News 2024, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/clyn31g50e3o

39 A doctor, tailor, and bride-to-be: Stories of those killed in Gaza, BBC News, 3 November 2023 https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-67278549

Hind Rajab

The killing of six-year-old Hind Rajab became one of the most haunting stories of Israel's war on Gaza. On 29 January 2024, Israeli forces opened fire on her family's car as they attempted to flee Gaza City, killing her relatives and leaving her trapped among their bodies.[40] For hours, she spoke with Palestinian Red Crescent Society dispatchers begging for help, before she too was killed. Two paramedics who tried to rescue her were also killed when their ambulance came under fire.[41]

The BBC's coverage of this incident was notably limited and cautious. The broadcaster published just two articles about Hind's death in February 2024 (5th and 10th), with headlines that used passive language: 'Unknown fate of six-year-old Hind Rajab trapped under fire'[42] and 'Hind Rajab, 6, found dead in Gaza days after phone calls for help'.[43]

In the introduction to this article, the reader is told the girl, and her family 'appear' to have come under fire from Israeli tanks. In its broadcast coverage, the BBC's framing remained similarly cautious, with a report stating that Hind 'was found dead along with several relatives and two paramedics who tried to save her' after 'the car she was in came under fire.'[44]

40 Killing of 5-year-old girl in Gaza sparks international condemnation as war continues, ABC News, 29 May 2024 https://abcnews.go.com/International/killing-5-year-girl-gaza-sparks-international-condemnation/story?id=110481771

41 UN Human Rights Commissioner statement, 19 July 2024 https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/07/gaza-killing-hind-rajab-and-her-family-war-crime-too-many-warn-experts

42 Israel-Gaza war: Unknown fate of six-year-old Hind Rajab trapped under fire, BBC News, 5 February 2024 https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-68180642

43 Hind Rajab, 6, found dead in Gaza days after phone calls for help, 10 February https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-68261286

44 BBC News Channel, 10 February 2024, 11:04

When criticised as to why the BBC did not describe the case for what it is, the killing of a 6 year old girl – the BBC defended its approach, saying it had 'fairly and accurately reported what we knew to that point'.[45] It also stood by the inclusion of the following line – 'Israel has previously accused Hamas of using ambulances to transport its weapons and fighters' – stating that this was 'background fact'.

While the BBC is correct that its initial reporting reflected the available facts, this same standard of accuracy should have compelled coverage of subsequent revelations that challenged the official Israeli narrative. Most notably, they did not report the U.S. State Department's disclosure that 'the Israelis told us there had, in fact, been IDF units in the area.'[46] The BBC also did not cover the UN Human Rights Commissioner's assessment later in July that the killing may constitute a war crime. After the initial February coverage, the BBC largely dropped the story, with only one further mention in an unrelated article about Columbia University protests.[47]

In March 2025 former BBC journalist Karishma Patel revealed that the BBC effectively sat on the story when the broadcaster first heard of Hind Rajab being trapped in a car with her murdered relatives. 'The BBC department I worked for chose not to cover her story that day', says Patel, and when the BBC did cover Rajab's plight, the organisation 'shied away from coming to a conclusion.'[48]

> **"The BBC department I worked for chose not to cover her story that day"**
>
> Former BBC journalist **Karishma Patel** on the BBC's reporting of the Hind Rajab murder

45 BBC News website, Hind Rajab, 6, found dead in Gaza days after phone calls for help, 27 February 2024, https://www.bbc.co.uk/contact/complaint/hindrajab

46 ABC News, 29 May 2024, (*previously cited)* https://abcnews.go.com/International/killing-5-year-girl-gaza-sparks-international-condemnation/story?id=110481771

47 Columbia protesters take over building after defying deadline, BBC News, 30 April 2024 https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-68923528

48 I'm a former BBC newsreader – Gaza is the reason I resigned, Karishma Patel, 5 March 2025 https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/bbc-gaza-documentary-tim-davie-israel-b2708547.html

Muhammad Bhar

In the case of Muhammed Bhar, a Palestinian man with Down's syndrome who died after being attacked by an IDF dog, the BBC's initial headline: 'The lonely death of Gaza man with Down's syndrome'[49] omitted Israeli responsibility entirely. Only after criticism was it changed to 'Gaza man with Down's syndrome attacked by IDF dog and left to die, mother tells BBC'.[50] Even then, the language suggested the dog, rather than the IDF, was the primary actor. The Israeli military's use of dogs to attack civilians was covered as early as June 2024 on Al Jazeera English.[51] On BBC broadcasts, the story appeared, towards the end of prime-time bulletins on 16 July 2024 and on 7 October 2024. In July, the story was introduced on TV in a way that favoured the perpetrator: 'The Israeli military says it was attacking Hamas militants hiding among civilians. More than 38,000 people have been killed in Gaza since the war began according to the Hamas-run health ministry. Fergal Keane reports now on the death of a young man with Down's syndrome who lived in the embattled district of Shejaiya, attacked by Israeli forces last week.'[52]

This imbalance in coverage creates a hierarchy in which Israeli lives appear more valuable, more human, and more worthy of emotional investment than Palestinian lives. It typically attributes responsibility to Hamas while at the same time leaving the impression that Palestinian deaths occur passively. By providing richer, more emotionally resonant portrayals of Israeli victims, while offering comparatively limited humanisation of Palestinian victims, the BBC's coverage creates an inaccurate and unfair hierarchy of grief and compassion.

49 The lonely death of Gaza man with Down's syndrome, BBC News, https://web.archive.org/web/20240716170309/https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cz9drj14e0lo

50 Gaza man with Down's syndrome attacked by IDF dog and left to die, mother tells BBC, BBC News, 16 July 2024, https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cz9drj14e0lo

51 Video shows Israeli military dog mauling elderly Palestinian woman amid army operation in Jabalia, AlJazeera English, 26 June 2024 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=reF-iLVWWhs&t=2s

52 BBC News at Ten, 16 July 2024, 22:22

Saifeddin (Saif) Issam Ayad Abutaha

In April 2024, an incident occurred when Israeli drones struck a World Central Kitchen (WCK) convoy in Gaza, killing seven aid workers from various nationalities. The attack, which the Israeli military later admitted was a 'grave mistake', sparked international outrage and temporarily halted WCK's operations in Gaza. The BBC's coverage detailed the attack, identified the victims, and reported on WCK's response, the Israeli military's acknowledgment and subsequent dismissal of two senior officers, as well as the broader implications for humanitarian aid in Gaza. The incident raised serious concerns about the safety of aid workers and led to discussions about the conduct of military operations in areas where humanitarian assistance is crucial. Owen Jones, in his report on the BBC's coverage of the war, states that the incident led to a spike in BBC coverage of Palestinian casualties because of the Westerners attacked at that time.[53]

Delegitimising death tolls: The BBC's use of the 'Hamas-run' qualifier

Between 7 October 2023 and 7 October 2024, the term 'Hamas-run health ministry' appeared in 1155 articles. Health ministry, without the qualifier Hamas-run, only appeared 119 times.[54] Strikingly, this qualifier was used in the BBC's online coverage almost as frequently as the number of articles mentioning casualties (1,342) – meaning readers encountered scepticism about Palestinian sources nearly as often as they learned about the Palestinian casualties themselves.

Centre for Media Monitoring's report 'Media Bias: Gaza 2023-24'[55] tracked instances of articles being updated to retroactively add the qualifier: for example on 16 November 2023, the piece 'How the dead are counted in Gaza'[56] reported on how Gaza's health ministry figures have held up to scrutiny in past Israeli aggression. A later version of the article inserted the words 'Hamas-run' health ministry.[57]

53 The BBC's Civil War Over Gaza, Drop Site News, 19 December 2024 https://www.dropsitenews.com/p/bbc-civil-war-gaza-israel-biased-coverage

54 Identified through keyword searches of the dataset.

55 Media Bias: Gaza 2023-24, Centre for Media Monitoring, January 2024

56 How the dead are counted in Gaza', BBC News, 17 November 1115am, via archive.org https://web.archive.org/web/20231116053645/https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-67347201

57 How the dead are counted in Gaza', BBC News, 17 November, accessed 05 January 2025 https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-67347201

“Health Ministry”

“Hamas-run health ministry”

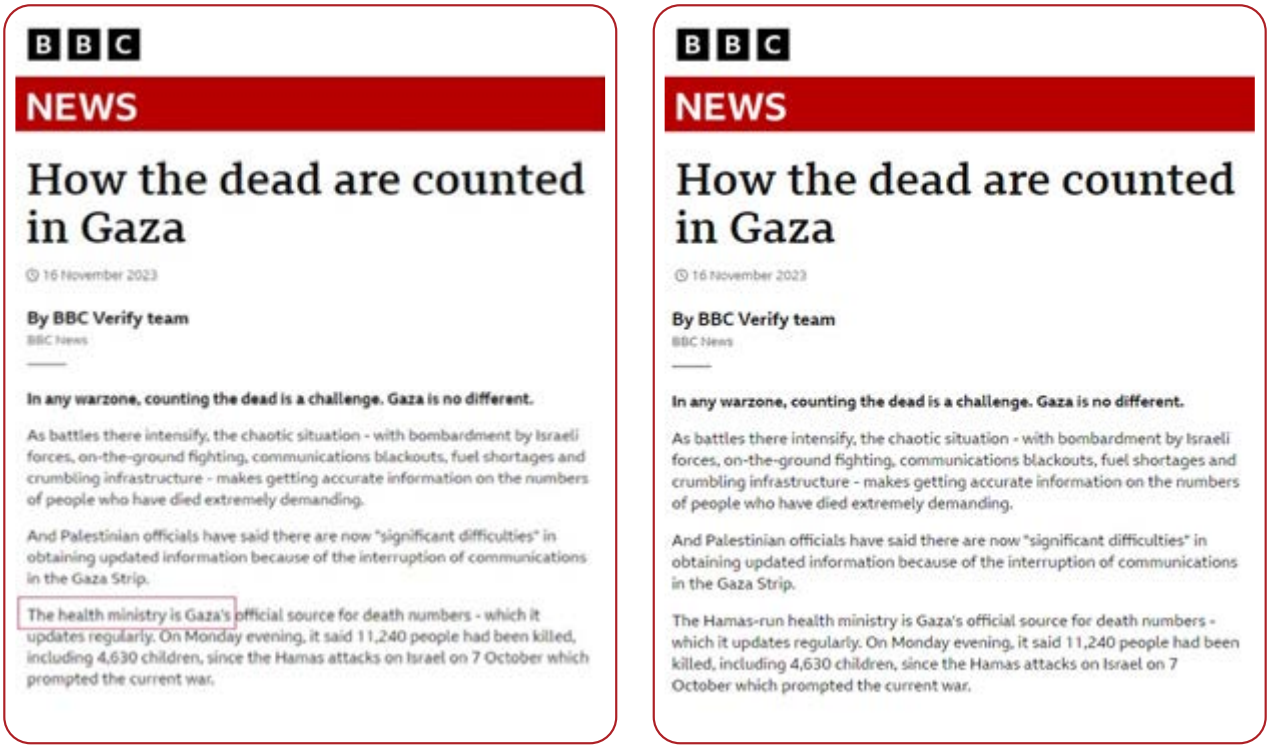
BBC
NEWS
How the dead are counted in Gaza
16 November 2023
By BBC Verify team
BBC News
In any warzone, counting the dead is a challenge. Gaza is no different.
As battles there intensify, the chaotic situation - with bombardment by Israeli forces, on-the-ground fighting, communications blackouts, fuel shortages and crumbling infrastructure - makes getting accurate information on the numbers of people who have died extremely demanding.
And Palestinian officials have said there are now "significant difficulties" in obtaining updated information because of the interruption of communications in the Gaza Strip.
The health ministry is Gaza's official source for death numbers - which it updates regularly. On Monday evening, it said 11,240 people had been killed, including 4,630 children, since the Hamas attacks on Israel on 7 October which prompted the current war.
BBC
NEWS
How the dead are counted in Gaza
16 November 2023
By BBC Verify team
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Image: BBC, November 2023, changed description of Palestinian health ministry to ‘Hamas-run’ on the same day.

By March 2025, the enormous Palestinian death toll passed 50,000 lives. The BBC marked this milestone with a story that explained how independent media were not allowed into Gaza to verify the figure. The headline for this article was: ‘More than 50,000 killed in Gaza since Israel offensive began, Hamas-run ministry says’.[58] Compare and contrast that with an Associated Press article that same day, entitled: ‘Palestinian death toll in Gaza’s war passes 50,000 as Israel expands new airstrikes’.[59]

58 ‘More than 50,000 killed in Gaza since Israel offensive began, Hamas-run ministry says, BBC News, 23 March 2025, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/clyz4nnqgvdo

59 Palestinian death toll in Gaza's war passes 50,000 as Israel expands new airstrikes, Associated Press/ABC News, 23 March 2025 https://abc7ny.com/post/middle-east-crisis-latest-palestinian-death-toll-gazas-war-passes-50000-israel-expands-new-airstrikes/16072805/

The BBC's use of the prefix phrase 'Hamas-run health ministry' and similar qualifiers presents a clear pattern of problematic framing. This practice appears particularly questionable given that international bodies and Israeli intelligence sources have reportedly confirmed[60] the general accuracy of the health ministry's casualty figures.

Hamas-run health ministry says 141 killed in Israeli strikes
Israel-Gaza war: More than 100 killed as crowd waits for aid, Hamas-run health ministry says
More than 40,000 killed in Gaza, Hamas-run health ministry says
Gaza strikes: Hamas-run health ministry says 700 killed in 24 hours
More than 30,000 killed in Gaza, Hamas-run health ministry says
Israel Gaza war: Hamas-run health ministry says Gaza death toll passes 10,000
Israeli strikes on southern Gaza kill 51, says Hamas-run health ministry
More than 25,000 now killed in Gaza since Israel offensive began, Hamas-run health ministry says
Israel strike kills 22 in Gaza school, says Hamas-run health ministry
Israeli strike in Gaza humanitarian zone kills 19, Hamas-run health ministry says

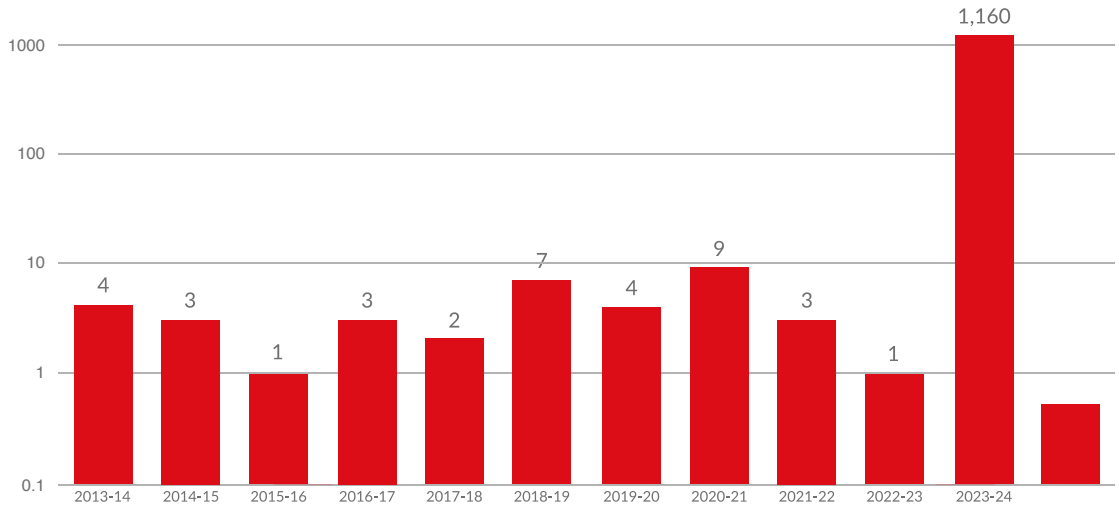
60 הצבא בדק ומצא שדיווחי ההרוגים במשרד, https://t.co/BHtOr7BfTk 24 January 2024

This persistent qualifying language subtly undermines the credibility of casualty figures, diminishes the humanitarian tragedy unfolding in Gaza, and implicitly associates the entire Palestinian civilian population with Hamas.

In the ten years prior to 7 October, fewer than 50 uses of 'Hamas-run' across BBC articles.[61] In other words, the BBC started to apply the qualifier more persistently when reporting on Palestinian deaths in Gaza after 7 October. For example, when reporting how Israel wiped out an entire family in an airstrike on 16 May 2021, a BBC article simply cited the 'Gaza health ministry' who said 'at least 227 people, including 102 children and women' were killed that month.[62] In an article examining life in Gaza first published in 2012[63] – which has since been updated[64] as seen through Archive.org – the phrase 'Hamas-run health ministry' was firmly included by December 2023 alongside the assertion that the 'Islamist group' is 'committed to the destruction of Israel'.

Graph 3

Use of 'Hamas-run' qualifier on BBC online articles over the last 10 years



The qualifier is seen in the headlines of several articles, such as one about an Israeli strike on a UN school that killed 50 people. While the article sensitively captured the plight of those killed with references to 'harrowing' footage of 'children's bodies', it simultaneously undermined the overall casualty figures by noting: 'The ministry does not make a distinction between combatants and civilians' and that 'the figures are often disputed by the Israeli government.'[65]

61 Based on a keyword search of BBC News articles through Google.com, searching for for "Hamas-run" on bbc.com. Accessed 20 January 2025

62 'His death is a catastrophe': Gaza doctors mourn specialist killed in airstrike, BBC News, 20 May 2021, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-57148580

63 Life in the Gaza Strip, BBC News, November 2012 https://web.archive.org/web/20121126093245/https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-20415675

64 Gaza Strip in maps: How 15 months of war have drastically changed life in the territory, BBC News, 16 January 2025 https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-20415675

65 Israeli strikes kill 50 in Gaza, Hamas-run health ministry says, BBC News, 16 February 2024 https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c0rnvy1zn10o

This article is also exemplary of the BBC's biases in highlighting statistical disputes while simultaneously failing to note that Israel has censored news coming out of Gaza by banning foreign journalists and media outlets, preventing verification, and by failing to challenge Israel's documented history of casualty misinformation (which we explore later in the report). There is no mention that the Gaza health ministry figures have been corroborated by international bodies, including the United Nations and other humanitarian groups, and have proven to be accurate in the past. The qualifier therefore re-enforces a concerted agenda to cast doubt on casualty figures without providing crucial context.

BBC NEWS

Israeli strikes kill 50 in Gaza, Hamas-run health ministry says

Unlike the BBC, Canada's national broadcaster has gone through a transparent process to explain why they have largely dropped the qualifying term. The CBC's ombudsman addressed this issue directly, noting that while factually accurate, the constant repetition of 'Hamas-run' risks 'contributing to a belief that every single Gazan is somehow linked to an organisation that carried out the October 7th attacks.' He recommended using such qualifiers 'as sparingly as possible, and only when relevant to the story at hand.'[66]

The qualifier also oversimplifies Gaza's health infrastructure, which includes both Hamas appointees and long-serving civil servants affiliated with other Palestinian factions. The Palestinian Authority in the West Bank maintains some oversight, including payment of salaries and provision of medical supplies.

This suggests the qualifier serves less as a legitimate caveat about data reliability and more as a means of undermining Palestinian sources while amplifying Israeli narratives – intentional or not.

A rare example that bucked this trend was the BBC's report on an Israeli school attack that killed 96 in October 2024, with the BBC noting: 'Israel does not allow international journalists, including from the BBC, independent access to Gaza, making verification of facts difficult.'[67] We submit that if the BBC routinely employs the 'Hamas-run' qualifier, it has a journalistic obligation to point out that previous numbers do all hold up to scrutiny. It should also prominently acknowledge that Israel is censoring the coverage of its military operations in Gaza by preventing independent verification and by barring foreign media access to Gaza.

As we observe in other parts of the report, the BBC applies no qualifier for Israelis killed. While the BBC fastidiously reminded audiences – at the start of the current escalation – that Hamas is a proscribed terrorist organisation, it fails to provide the equally relevant context that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and others stand accused of war crimes and are wanted by the International Criminal Court, nor does it routinely point out that the International Court of Justice found it plausible that Israel's acts could amount to genocide. Israel is not referred to as occupying force, nor does the BBC reference how organisations such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, or the Israeli Yesh Din and B'Tselem all describe Israel as being an 'Apartheid' state.

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66 A Divisive Phrase, Jack Nagler, CBC Radio, 23 December 2023 https://cbc.radio-canada.ca/en/ombudsman/reviews/A_Divisive_Phrase

67 Israeli strikes on Gaza mosque and school kill 26, health ministry says, BBC News, 6 October 2024, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c0jwv16qwqjo

As stated in the report 'Media Bias: Gaza 2023-24', 'there has been an active campaign to force media outlets to describe the health ministry as "Hamas-run"'.[68] The campaign to cast doubt on the casualty figures has been led by influential groups supporting Israel's attacks on Gaza. As well as its longstanding application of the Hamas-run qualifier, the BBC also published a lengthy article on 23 April 2025 about the Gaza health ministry revising its figures.

sky news
ANALYSIS
Hundreds of names removed from official Gaza war death list
The names have been removed pending further investigation, Gaza's health ministry says. Experts tell Sky News there is no sign of deliberate manipulation.
By Ben van der Merwe, digital investigations journalist
Saturday 5 April 2025 09:01, UK

While the article acknowledged that 'Israel does not provide its figures for civilian deaths in Gaza and has not officially challenged any of the names on the local health ministry casualty list', its headline and framing does the job: 'Gaza health ministry denies manipulating death toll figures'.[69] Compare and contrast the BBC's April 2025 analysis with Sky News' analysis of the same story weeks before. The BBC: 'Hundreds of names removed from official Gaza war death list'. Sky News: 'The names have been removed pending further investigation, Gaza's health ministry says. Experts tell Sky News there is no sign of deliberate manipulation.'[70]

68 Op. Cit., Media Bias Gaza 2023-24, Centre for Media Monitoring, January 2024, p. 106 https://cfmm.org.uk/cfmm-report-media-bias-gaza-2023-24/

69 'Gaza health ministry denies manipulating death toll figures, BBC News, 23 April 2025 https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cx25x35476yo

70 Hundreds of names removed from official Gaza war death list, Sky News, 5 April 2025, https://news.sky.com/story/hundreds-of-names-removed-from-official-gaza-war-death-list-13341928

Recommendations

Value Palestinian lives: With over 34 times more civilians killed, ensure Palestinian deaths are covered proportionately, with clear victim and perpetrator attribution.

Humanise Palestinian victims equally: Ensure Palestinian victims receive personal profiles, family testimonials and the emotional depth afforded to Israeli victims, rather than treating them as anonymous statistics.

Be clear who is doing the killing: Avoid passive language when describing the killing of Palestinians, clearly identifying Israel as the perpetrator.

Routine Israeli denials should be challenged: Israeli denials should be caveated with the facts of previous high-profile Israeli denials which have subsequently proved to be false. For example, the killing of the Palestinian child Hind Rajab.

Apply death toll prominence proportionally: When Palestinian casualties significantly outnumber Israeli casualties, reflect this reality in headline prominence and story placement, avoiding false equivalence in reporting.

Ditch qualifiers designed to cast doubt on casualty figures: Adopt peer journalistic standards to use the 'Hamas-run' qualifier sparingly and only when directly relevant, acknowledging that Gaza Health Ministry figures have been consistently deemed as reliable by international bodies, including the United Nations.

Provide context for casualty debates: When discussing contested figures, note Israel's refusal to provide alternative civilian death toll data.

Acknowledge verification limitations: Clearly state when Israel prevents independent verification by barring journalists' access to Gaza when reporting on casualty figures. Also use the word censorship to describe Israel's position on foreign journalists.

2. BIAS THROUGH LANGUAGE CHOICES

Key Findings

- **'Massacre' applied to attacks against Israelis:** The word **'massacre(d)'** was applied almost **18 times more frequently to Israeli victims** than Palestinian victims in BBC articles. Meanwhile, it appeared in article **headlines five times** – all **exclusively for attacks on Israelis**. Despite numerous mass casualty attacks against Palestinians, the term **never appeared** in headlines describing Palestinian deaths.
- **More emotive language for Israeli victims: BBC articles used emotive terms** ('atrocities', 'slaughter', 'barbaric', 'deadly', 'brutal') almost **four times as much** when describing Israeli victims. In TV/radio, **70%** of all emotive terms used by BBC correspondents and presenters referred to Israeli victims of attacks.
- **Israelis are 'butchered', Palestinians simply 'die':** The **words 'butchered', 'butcher', 'butchering'** were **used exclusively for Israeli victims** by BBC correspondents and presenters. Similarly, **'murder(ed)' was referenced 220 times** for actions against Israelis and **just once** for Palestinians.
- **Masking the perpetrator:** When reporting attacks on Palestinians, the BBC consistently obscured Israeli responsibility through **passive language** in headlines (e.g., 'Air strike on Gaza school kills at least 15 people' rather than identifying Israel as the perpetrator).

Language serves as the primary vehicle through which conflicts are interpreted by global audiences, directly influencing public opinion and policy decisions. In this section, we examine the BBC's use of language with regards to Israel's war on Gaza, building on pre-existing research.

In 2011, the Glasgow Media Group found that the BBC used terms such as 'atrocity', 'brutal murder', 'mass murder', and 'massacre' to describe the deaths of Israelis, whilst the word 'terrorist' was often associated with Palestinians.[71] Recent work by Jan Lietava and Dana Najjar showed that this pattern continues, with BBC coverage using 'murder(ed)' 101 times for Israelis versus once for Palestinians, whilst humanising terms were used far more frequently for Israeli victims.[72] Last year, a Centre for Media Monitoring study examined one month's coverage (7 October 2023 to 7 November 2023) of Israel's war on Gaza, revealing across the British media an overwhelming linguistic bias towards Israeli victims versus Palestinians.

71 More Bad News From Israel, Greg Philo, Mike Berry and the Glasgow Media Group, Pluto Press, 2011, pp. 223-231. Also at https://www.glasgowmediagroup.org/downloads/17-warand-conflict

72 Analysing the bias in BBC reporting on Palestine, Jan Lietava and Dana Najjar, https://github.com/onlineyan/bbc-bias

The report found that 'two out of every three emotive terms used in TV broadcasts were used in conjunction with the 7 October attacks or deaths of Israelis. Just one in ten were used in conjunction with the deaths of Palestinians or the bombardment of Gaza.'[73] To investigate the BBC's use of language around Israel's war on Gaza further, this report utilised a Large Language Model classifier to examine our dataset of 3,873 articles and 32,092 broadcast segments (TV/radio).[74]

The BBC's coverage was tracked via the usage of the following emotive search terms: ***atrocity, atrocities, barbaric, barbarism, butcher, butchered, butchering, horrific, horrifying, massacre, massacres, massacring, massacred, murderous, slaughter, slaughtered, slaughtering.*** We identified some of these words for further investigation based on our research of articles and transcripts, while others were flagged by BBC journalists themselves who pointed out the Corporation's inconsistent use of language.[75]

We found 565 mentions of the above terms across online output in our dataset (excluding videos).

The same timeline was used for broadcast segments as well. The terms cited above (including repeats) were used on a total of 7,358 occasions including repeats.

The AI analysis looked at how many times terms with the same root word were used by BBC presenters and reporters to describe Israeli or Palestinian victims. It further measured how many times the terms were used on BBC platforms by non-BBC personnel including utterances by politicians as part of a speech. Almost every term used showed an overwhelming bias in usage towards Israeli victims. A more detailed methodology can be found in the core methodology section.

WORDS USED FOR ISRAELI VICTIMS

WORDS USED FOR PALESTINIAN VICTIMS

73 Based on a random sample of 100 occasions for each word where the words "atrocities", "massacre" and "slaughter" were used: Media Bias Gaza 2023-24, Centre for Media Monitoring, 2024

74 See Appendix 1: LLM Classification Methodology #7-8 – all subsequent references to the LLM / AI data in this section are explained in this appendix.

75 Turmoil at the BBC: 'Gravest Possible Concerns' at Its Gaza Coverage, Jadaliyya, https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/45466

Language use overview

Articles	Broadcast (TV and radio)
Disproportionate or non-existent responsibility: The term 'killed' was used almost equally for Palestinian and Israeli victims (1,167 v 1,163) in online articles, despite 34x more Gazan deaths. Meanwhile, the term 'died' was used in greater numbers to refer to Palestinian victims compared with Israelis (50 v 7). **One-sided humanisation:** BBC journalists used emotive terms (see list below) almost four times as much in reference to Israeli victims compared with Palestinians. **Sensational language primarily for one side:** The term 'massacre' was applied almost 18 times more frequently to Israeli victims than Palestinians victims. The word was used five times in BBC headlines – all applied to attacks on Israelis. Attacks against Israelis were described as atrocities four times more than when describing attacks against Palestinians. The terms 'barbaric', 'butcher' and 'terrorism' were used exclusively to describe attacks on Israelis. Meanwhile, 'murder', or 'murderous', 'murdered' was used almost 60 times in reference to attacks on Israelis and less than 10 times when referring to Palestinians. **Emotive adjectives favour Israeli victims:** Out of a total of 178 adjectives identified by the AI, the four most frequently used terms – 'deadly', 'brutal', 'barbaric', and 'murderous' – were used in far greater numbers for Israeli victims.	**Emotive language reserved for Israeli Victims**: BBC presenters and reporters used emotive terms such as 'deadly', 'brutal', 'barbaric', 'murderous' and 'brutally' almost four times more to describe Israeli victims compared with Palestinians. **Limited care for Palestinian victims:** 70% of emotive terms used by BBC presenters or reporters referred to Israeli victims of attacks. **Sensational language for one side only:** The words 'barbaric', 'barbarian/s', 'barbaric' were used over four times as much for attacks on Israelis as compared to Palestinians by BBC personnel. The words 'atrocity' or 'atrocities' against Israelis were referenced 17 times as much by BBC personnel, compared to Palestinians. 'Murder', 'murdered', 'murderous', 'murderer/s' were referenced 220 times by BBC presenters and reporters for actions against Israelis and just once for Palestinians. Israelis were described as having been 'massacred' or having suffered a 'massacre' almost five times as much as Palestinians. The words 'butchered', 'butcher', 'butchering' were used exclusively for Israeli victims when used by BBC personnel.

We find a pattern where the language used by the BBC is heavily focused on the perceived intent and cruelty of the perpetrator. Terms like 'murdered,' 'slaughtered,' 'butchered,' 'barbaric,' 'vicious,' and 'heinous' are not merely descriptions of death but deeply subjective characterisations emphasising the act's brutality and the perpetrator's malevolence. The focus centres on the perceived depravity of individual acts of violence, often characterised as terrorism—a term used exclusively to refer to violence against Israelis.

We also find the frequent use of the term 'killed' and 'died', and how the more passive description of someone having died is more often reserved for Palestinian victims. This is examined in detail at the end of this section.

The use of emotive terms

Table 2: Emotive Terms for Victims in BBC Broadcasts

	BBC presenters & journalists	Interviewees
Israeli victims	1,715	3,057
Palestinian victims	474	1345
Both	132	238
Other	116	230
Total	**2,437**	**4,870**

Note: We have not included 51 clips where the emotive terms were used but AI could not determine who the term was referring to.

Table 3: Emotive Terms for Victims in BBC Articles

	Statements by BBC journalists	Sources or interviewees quoted
Israeli victims	170	183
Palestinian victims	45	168
Total	**215**	**351**

Table 3: Count of mentions of emotive terms in reference to Israeli victims versus Palestinian victims in articles

Emotive Terms: examples from BBC Radio and TV

The word **'barbaric**' is used by BBC Security Correspondent, Frank Gardner, to describe the 7 October attacks specifically targeting Israel and Israeli civilians. The context makes this explicitly clear as he refers to 'Israel was attacked in the most horrific way on October the 7th' and specifically mentions 'particularly to the people at the festival,' referring to the Nova music festival attack where Israeli civilians were targeted.[76]

On occasions when the emotive terms have been used by guests or interviewees (non-BBC), language has been left unchallenged when it has dehumanised Palestinians. The use of the word 'barbaric' on BBC Newsnight is one such example. The presenter, Mark Urban, did not challenge Israeli politician Danny Danon when he referred to Palestinians as **'barbaric animals'.**[77] Danon was responding to a question about the then 7,000+ Gazans who had been killed and whether he was concerned about the diminishing support for Israelis as more Palestinians were being killed.

BBC Middle East Correspondent Yolande Knell used the word **'murderous'** when providing analysis of the current Israel/Gaza news story. The word appears in the context of describing Hamas's actions on 7 October, specifically referring to their attack as a 'murderous rampage across southern Israel.'[78]

76 Frank Gardner on BBC 2, 26 September 2024, 11:00
77 Danny Danon interviewed by Mark Urban, Newsnight BBC 2, 27 October 27 20:39 GMT
78 Yollande Knell on BBC World News, 4 August 2024, 12:00

The BBC's Jeremy Bowen referenced **'slaughter'** in the Radio 4 documentary, Mandates. Bowen used the term 'slaughter' to describe attacks against Jews (Israelis) in Hebron. This is evident from several contextual clues:

1. The text explicitly mentions 'an Arab Palestinian mob went on the rampage attacking Jews in the street'.
2. The violence spread to Hebron, resulting in 133 Jewish deaths.
3. The Israeli leadership specifically called it a 'pogrom' - a term historically used to describe organised massacres of Jewish people.

While the text notes that Arabs were also killed (116), most of these were killed by British forces or Jewish attackers.[79]

The word **'slaughter'** was also referenced by BBC Radio 4 Today programme presenter Amol Rajan in a high-profile interview with former footballer and ex-BBC presenter Gary Lineker.[80] Whilst this example is outside the data set for this study it is nevertheless an insight into the current state of affairs and position of senior BBC presenters who challenge a point about the ongoing murder of Palestinian children by referring back to the attacks of 7 October 2023 using emotive and evocative language as has been the case previously.

Gary Lineker:

"The mass murder of thousands of children is something I think we should have a little opinion on."

Amol Rajan: ***"The BBC as a whole needs to be impartial about it."***

Lineker: ***"Why?" (and points out that it wasn't on Ukraine).***

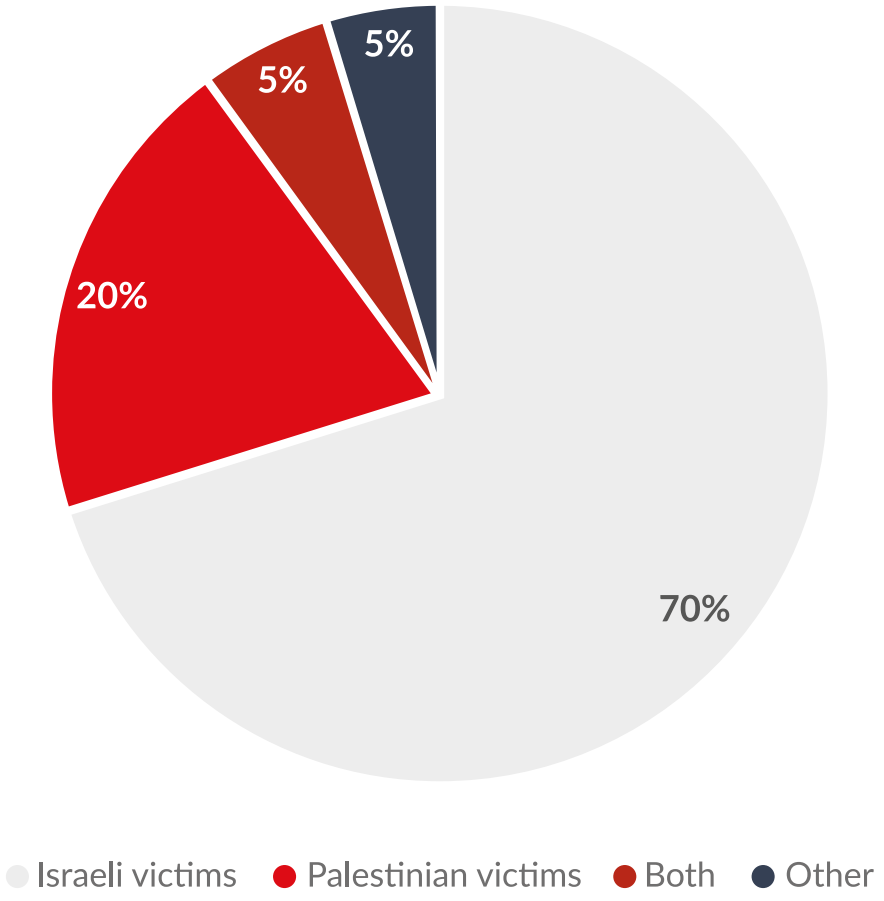
Amol Rajan:

"The Israeli position is that what's happening in Gaza is a response to the slaughter and the capture of innocent Israelis on October the 7th."

79 Jeremy Bowen on BBC Radio 4, 12/20/2023, 11:55
80 Gary Lineker on Amol Rajan Interviews, BBC2, 04/22/2025, 19:00

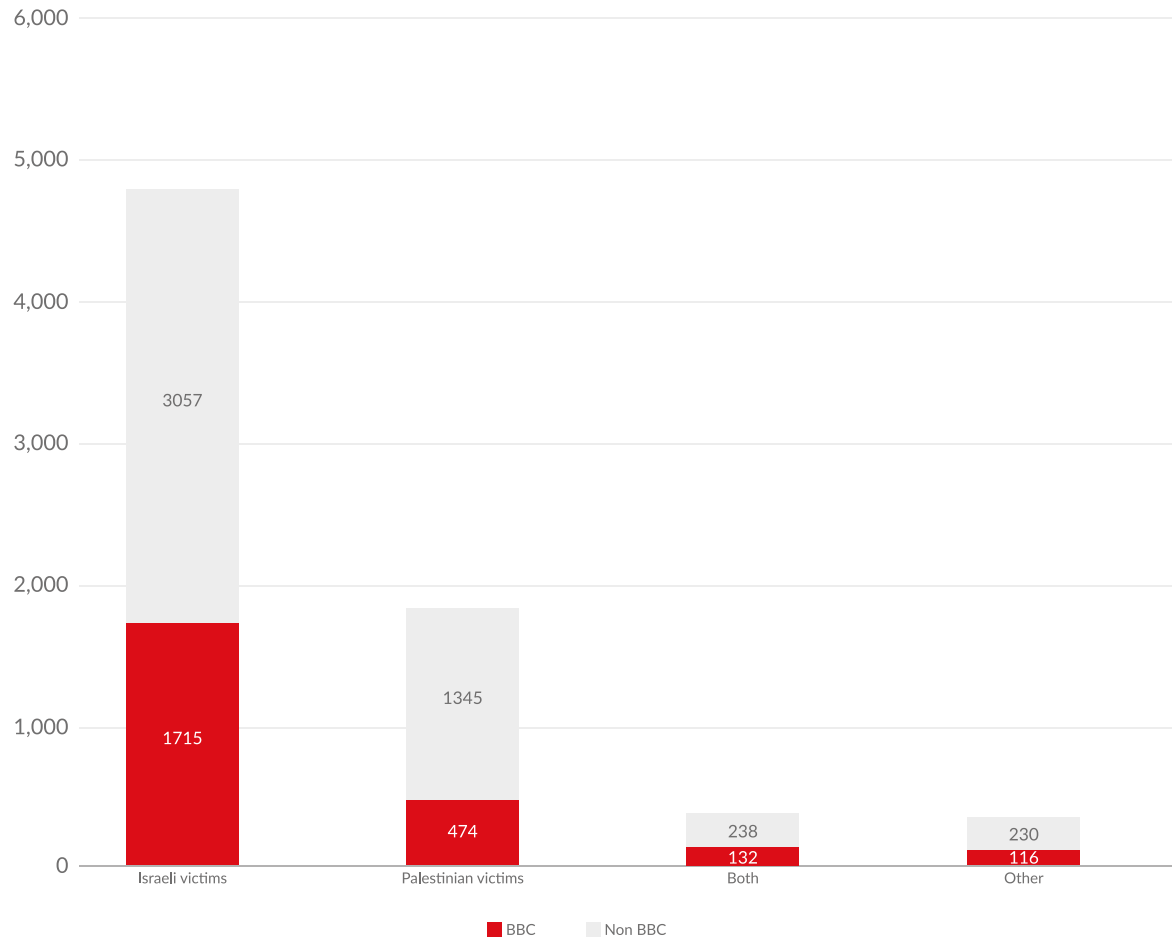
Graph 4

Use of emotive terms by BBC presenters and journalists



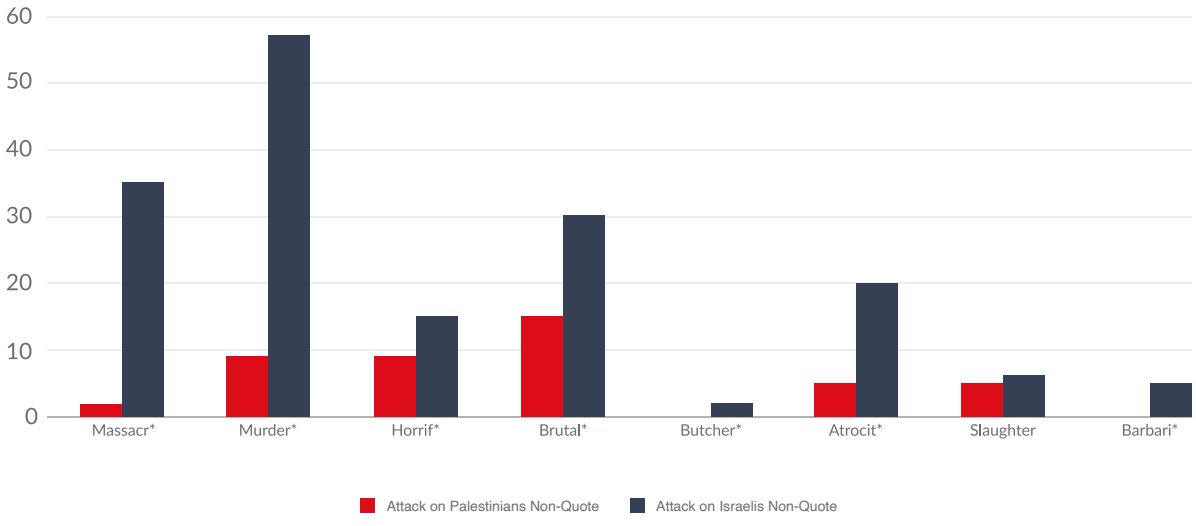
Graph 5

Use of emotive terms by BBC Broadcast stations



Graph 6

Use of emotive terms by BBC journalists in articles when referring to Israeli and Palestinians victims of attacks



Emotive terms: examples from BBC articles

When describing the attacks by Hamas on 7 October, one survivor of a kibbutz (on occupied land near Gaza) is being interviewed and his sentiments are summarised with the following sentence: 'The people of Nir Am would have been slaughtered, he says, just as they were at some other kibbutzim, communities organised as collectives, often farms.'[81] The word 'slaughtered' in this context conveys the brutal and indiscriminate nature of the threat, highlighting the vulnerability of civilians in conflict zones. It emphasises the urgency and intensity of the defence mounted by the community to protect themselves.

In the summary text of a profile article on the volunteers from Zaka, a religious organisation whose job was to collect the remains of those killed on 7 October 2023, the author describes 'Hamas's murderous attack.'[82] Later in the article he profiles a family who he says, 'were two parents and three young children who had been murdered by Hamas in their home in the kibbutz in Kfar Azza.'[83]

Both mentioned above are employed to underscore the extreme violence and unlawful killings associated with the Hamas attacks, highlighting the severity of the situation and the subsequent efforts to recover and honour the victims.

Israeli newspaper Haaretz cross-referenced some of the claims made by Zaka volunteers with available evidence and forced Zaka to admit that some of its members may have 'misinterpreted' what they saw and that they were not professional pathologists.[84] One online article on the BBC website quoted a Zaka volunteer describing signs of torture and mutilation and a foetus ripped from its mother's womb, which the BBC correspondent admitted could not be independently verified and had been questioned by Israeli media yet still chose to include in the coverage two months on from the Hamas attacks of 7 October.[85]

81 Ex-soldier fought off Hamas and saved kibbutz neighbours, BBC News, 12 October 2023, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-67089113

82 Zaka: The volunteers giving dignity to Israel's dead, BBC News, 14 October 2023, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-67100014

83 Ibid.

84 Israeli personnel gave false information about 7 October attack crimes - report, 3 December 2023, https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/israel-palestine-war-personnel-false-information-7-october-attack

85 Israel Gaza: Hamas raped and mutilated women on 7 October, BBC hears. BBC News, 5 December 2023, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-67629181

We see the deployment of different emotive terms in other conflicts too. In Section 8, we contrast the BBC's coverage of Gaza with the conflict in Ukraine. There, we identify headlines stating how 'Russia wipes out three generations of a Ukrainian family'.[86]

Yet, this study found no such BBC headlines for the many more generations of Palestinians wiped out by Israel's attacks. Mainstream outlets such as the Associated Press[87] and Le Monde[88] have, on the other hand, have used such terms.

BBC NEWS

In a split second, Russia wipes out three generations of a Ukrainian family

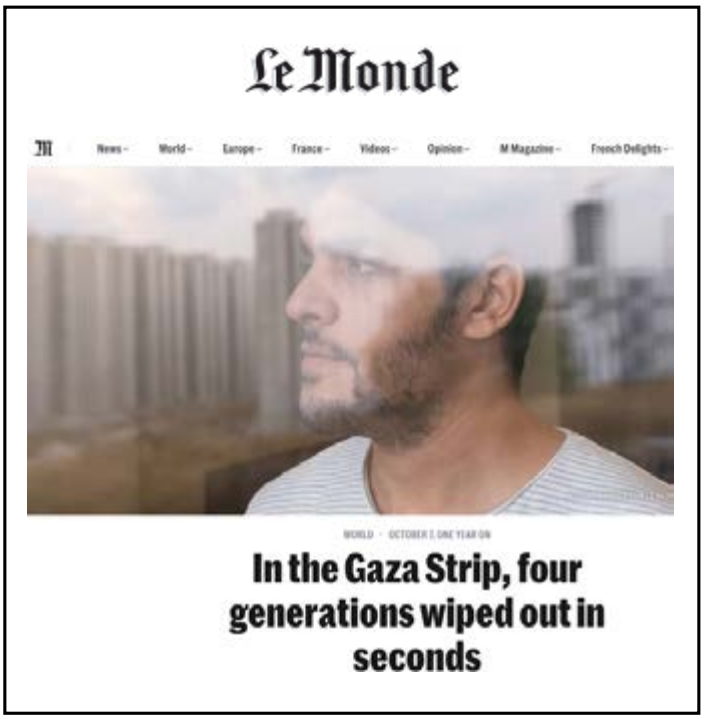
Sophiia Buhayova, 27, Adam Buhayov, 17 months, and Tetiana Tarasevych, 68, were all killed in a Russian bombing attack in Zaporizhzhia

86 In a split second, Russia wipes out three generations of a Ukrainian family, BBC News, 28 January 2025, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cwyp8nkgxj3o

87 The war in Gaza has wiped out entire Palestinian families. AP documents 60 who lost dozens or more, 17 June 2024, https://www.ap.org/news-highlights/spotlights/2024/the-war-in-gaza-has-wiped-out-entire-palestinian-families-ap-documents-60-who-lost-dozens-or-more/

88 In the Gaza Strip, four generations wiped out in seconds, Le Monde, 11 October 2024, https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2024/10/11/in-the-gaza-strip-four-generations-wiped-out-in-seconds_6729106_4.html

AP
CONTENT
SOLUTIONS
WHO WE SERVE
INSIGHTS
Home — News Highlights — Spotlights — The war in Gaza has wiped out en
SPOTLIGHTS
The war in Gaza has wiped out entire Palestinian families. AP documents 60 who lost dozens or more



Instead, the BBC presents us with headlines marked by indirect language such as: 'Gaza casualties: "Most of the children in my family photo are dead"'[89] (rather than 'killed by the IDF') and 'Israel Gaza: Father loses 11 family members in one blast' (rather than wiped out by Israel).[90] The word 'wiped-out', though absent from the headlines of both articles, does appear in the leading paragraph of the above article.

89 'Gaza casualties: "Most of the children in my family photo are dead"', BBC News, 11 November 2023, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-67273969

90 'Israel Gaza: Father loses 11 family members in one blast', BBC News, 31 October 2023, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-67277205

BBC NEWS
Gaza casualties: 'Most of the children in my family photo are dead'
11 November 2023
AHMED AL-NAOUQ
Ahmed al-Naouq took this family selfie four years ago - most of the children in the photo are now dead

BBC NEWS
Israel Gaza: Father loses 11 family members in one blast
31 October 2023
Khalil Khader lost 11 family members in one blast

This confirms the findings the Centre for Media Monitoring published in 2024,[91] and the analysis conducted by other experts. Writing to the BBC Director-General Tim Davie, BBC correspondent Rami Ruhayem stated: 'Words like "massacre", "slaughter", and "atrocities" are being used — prominently in reference to actions by Hamas, but hardly, if at all, in reference to actions by Israel."[92] He added; 'When the BBC uses such language selectively, with the standard of selection being the identity of the perpetrators/victims, the BBC is making a statement—albeit implicit. It implies that the lives of one group of people are more valuable than the lives of another.'

91 Media Bias Gaza 2023-24, Centre for Media Monitoring, January 2024, p. 64 https://cfmm.org.uk/cfmm-report-media-bias-gaza-2023-24/
92 Turmoil at the BBC: "Gravest Possible Concerns" at Its Gaza Coverage, 1 November 2023, https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/45466

The use of emotive adjectives to reinforce language to describe attacks shows a clear preference for delineating attacks against Israelis as particularly bad. Out of a total of 178 adjectives identified by the Large Language Model classifier, the four most frequently used terms all favoured Israeli victims and can be seen in the table below. Together, they describe acts or individuals marked by extreme aggression, cruelty, or lethal intent.

Table 4: Adjectives used for attacks on Israelis and Palestinians

Word	Attack on Palestinians	Attack on Israelis
Deadly	21	61
Brutal	11	23
Barbaric	4	18
Murderous	3	20
Brutally	0	6
Heinous	0	5

The terms 'murder' or 'murdered' or 'murderous' are the most frequently used emotive terms as seen in online articles according to our analysis. Here we look at how one of these terms 'murderous' is reinforced by other emotive language when used to describe attacks on Israelis.

When looking at just the term 'murderous' (20) we see how it is exceptionally prominent, and in describing attacks on Israelis. This word carries strong legal and moral condemnation, implying unlawful killing with malicious intent.

Murdered is strongly reinforced by a cluster of intensely condemnatory words like 'slaughtered' (3), 'barbaric' (3), 'vicious' (3), 'butchered' (3), 'heinous' (3), 'evil' (1), 'savagely' (2), and 'despicable' (2). These terms paint a picture of extreme, depraved cruelty and an inherent evil in the perpetrators and their actions. Some of this language is attributed to Israeli spokespeople such as Daniel Hagari who said when the bodies of six Israeli captives were recovered: 'they were "brutally murdered by Hamas terrorists shortly before we reached them".[93]

Another emotive term which features heavily is the word 'barbaric' and its related terms. The term 'barbaric' and its related terms 'barbarism', 'barbarian', 'barbaric' and 'barbarous' show a clear bias in favour of Israel (21) compared with description of killings of Palestinians (6). One example of this is the reporting of the words of King Charles on 11 October 2023, with the headline: 'Israel-Gaza attacks: Royals condemn 'barbaric' Hamas attack on Israel."[94]

The term is used as an intensifying descriptor to emphasise the savagery and uncivilized nature of the attacking party, primarily Hamas and Palestinians. Similarly, words such as 'deadly,' 'brutal,' 'barbaric,' and 'murderous' are all adjectives used to describe extreme violence or cruelty, especially in the context of lethal or savage actions. They fall under the broader category of violent or inhumane behaviour.

93 Israel recovers bodies of six Gaza hostages, BBC News, 1 September 2024 https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/ce31ddege9vo

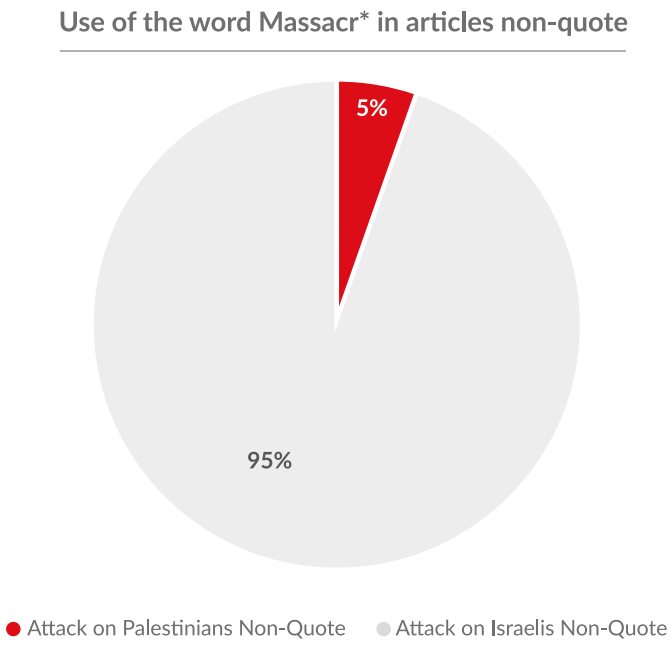
94 Israel-Gaza attacks: Royals condemn 'barbaric' Hamas attack on Israel, BBC News, 11 October 2023 https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-67080828

‘Massacre’ used more frequently for attacks against Israelis

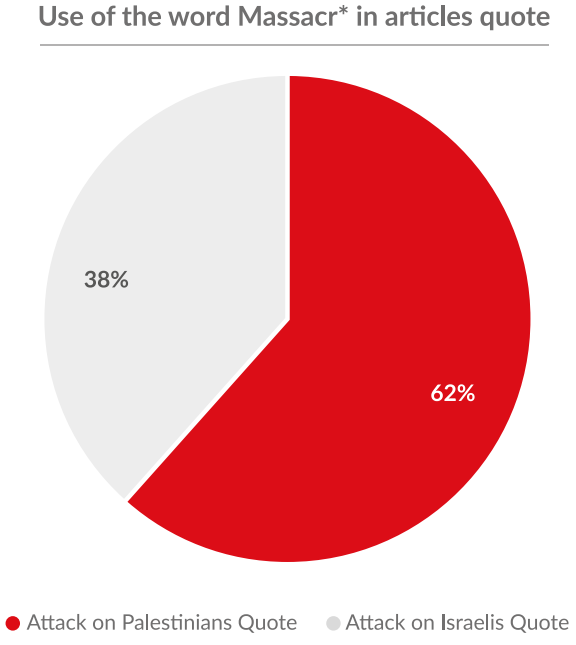
When the terms ‘massacre’, ‘massacres’, ‘massacred’ or ‘massacring’[95] were used in an editorial capacity without attribution (without quotes) to any source or individual, BBC reporters and editors show a clear bias towards attacks on Israeli victims. The words were applied to Israeli victims in 95% of instances when not quoting others. The words were applied to Israeli victims almost 18 times more than Palestinian victims when not quoting others with 35 instances of the former said to have been massacred. A massacre of Palestinians when not quoted was found in only two articles.

When the term massacre and related terms was being quoted, we see 62% of usage attributed to attacks on Palestinians. This is still out of proportion to the death toll where conservative estimates put Palestinian deaths at 50,000 plus compared to approximately 1,200 Israeli civilians, IDF soldiers and other Israelis.

Graph 7



Graph 8



95 Words: massacre OR massacres OR massacred OR massacring

Massacre used exclusively in headlines for attacks on Israelis

In headlines, the BBC used the term 'massacre' exclusively for Israeli victims. The word 'massacre' appeared in BBC article headlines five times in our dataset of online articles, all of them attributed to the Kibbutz attack and only once in parenthesis. Despite several mass casualty attacks against Palestinians the rest of the year, the word was never deployed in a BBC headline, not even if attributed to third parties such as human rights groups[96] or Palestinian officials.

One example of the use of 'massacre' for Israeli victims was in an online article on 10 October headlined: 'Inside Kfar Aza where Hamas militants killed families in their homes'. The reporter tells us: 'Soldiers who spent much of the day in the ruins recovering bodies of civilians said that there had been a massacre.'[97]

BBC
For you
Home
News
Sport
Weather
iPlayer
NEWS
Home | InDepth | Israel-Gaza war | War in Ukraine | Climate | UK | World | Business | Politics | Culture
World | Africa | Asia | Australia | Europe | Latin America | Middle East | US & Canada
Supernova festival: How massacre unfolded from verified video and social media
10 October 2023
Israel-Gaza war

News article[98]

Although the word 'massacre' was not used in headlines in relation to attacks on Palestinians, it is referenced in the body of the articles, mostly when cited by others and not in the same definitive way to describe attacks against Israelis. For example, on 12 November 2023 when relaying an eye-witness account from Dr Khalil al-Duqran who said: '"They are coming now, hundreds of injured people, dozens have injuries in the head and limbs," he shouted, over sounds of chaos in the background. 'This is a massacre of our people."'[99] Alternatively, descriptions of attacks on Israelis have at times received multiple descriptors without attribution such as in this piece which reports on a new Storyville documentary for victims of 7 October.[100]

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96 Palestinian human rights organisations call on the international community to intervene to stop Israeli massacres in Gaza and provide protection to Palestinian civilians, ReliefWeb, 9 October 2023 https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/palestinian-human-rights-organizations-call-international-community-intervene-stop-israeli-massacres-gaza-and-provide-protection-palestinian-civilians-enar

97 Inside Kfar Aza where Hamas militants killed families in their homes, BBC News, 10 October 2023, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-67065205

98 Supernova festival: How massacre unfolded from verified video and social media, BBC News, 10 October 2023, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-67056741

99 In Gaza, fleeing refugees face hunger and disease: 'We are in the Dark Ages', BBC News, 12 November 2023 https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-67391335

100 Victims of October 7 massacre at Nova Music Festival to be honoured in new BBC Storyville documentary, BBC News, 10 September 2024 https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/2024/bbc-storyville-documentary-surviving-october-7-we-will-dance-again

BBC Storyville has commissioned Surviving October 7th: We Will Dance Again - a powerful film providing a harrowing glimpse into the **brutal assault** on partygoers at the Nova Music Festival - one of the sites in Israel, attacked by Hamas on October 7 2023. The 90-minute documentary will air on BBC Two and iPlayer on Thursday 26 September at 9pm.

The human cost of the violence in Israel that day, and the war that has followed in Gaza has been catastrophic. This film focuses on events at the Nova Music Festival, with a minute-by-minute account showing how a music festival filled with young, peace-loving, partygoers just wanting to celebrate life, love and music, turned into a **massacre.**

Beginning on the evening of Friday 6 October, thousands of partygoers, Israelis and other foreign nationals, started to gather for the music festival in the Negev Desert, in the south of Israel. At 6.30am on Saturday 7 October, with the party approaching its climax, at sunrise, some thought the rockets that started appearing overhead were fireworks. Partygoers ran, they hid under stages, a fridge, in toilets, bushes, cars and a skip full of rubbish. The film features recollections and videos from the six or more hours that those who survived spent in hiding or trying to escape.

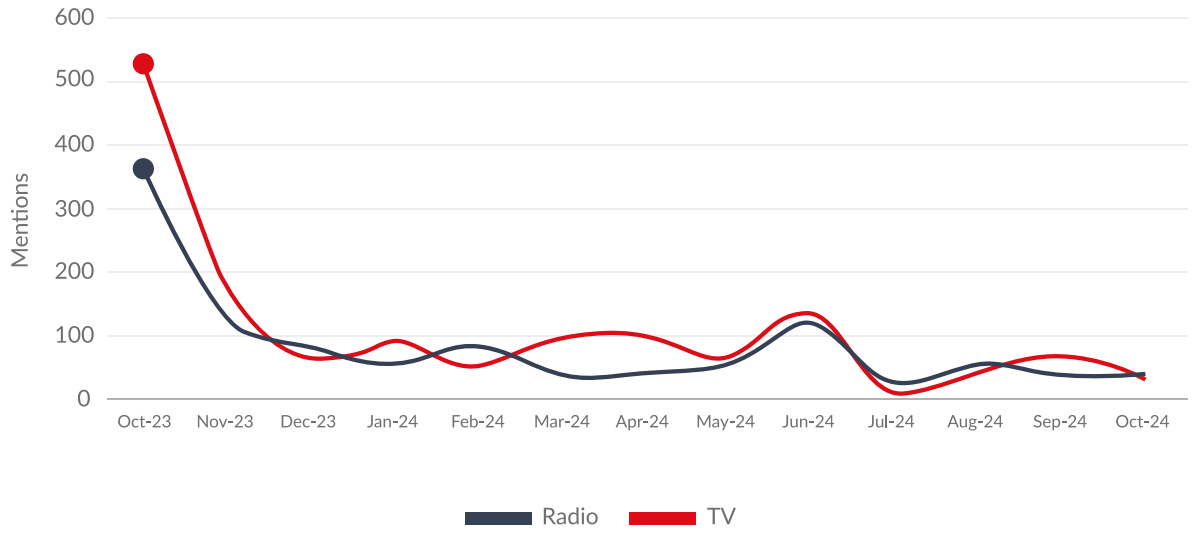
Using the testimony of survivors, CCTV, mobile phone and car dashcam footage, and GoPro footage from Hamas live stream, the film shares the very telling personal stories of those who lived, those taken hostage and those who died, as confusion turned into fear, and then chaos when Hamas arrived and began to **slaughter** anyone in sight.

Use of 'massacre' in broadcast

A similar observation can be made, in broadcast, where the word massacre is used without caveats for attacks on Israelis, but not on Palestinians. Examples start from 9 October 2023 when Jeremy Bowen said: 'This, the aftermath after just one Hamas massacre. The place where hundreds of young people who'd come to party in the desert were murdered. The scale, even for Israel, which has experienced plenty of violence, unprecedented.'[101] As stated in the previous section, there was also a reporter who emotively retold how one person found out about a friend who was 'one of the more than 250 massacred that morning at the music festival'.[102] And into 2024, on the anniversary of the 7 October attack, Christian Fraser stated on the BBC's 'The Context' show: 'Politicians in Israel have frequently compared the massacre on October 7th to the Holocaust'.[103]

Graph 9

'Massacre' mentions in BBC broadcasts in relation to Gaza



101 BBC News at Six, BBC One, 9 October 2023, 18:05
102 BBC World Service, 10 October 2023, 09:49
103 The Context, BBC News channel, 9 October 2023, 20:13

‘Who killed them?’ Why the BBC has trouble identifying perpetrators of war crimes

This section explores the BBC’s record in identifying the perpetrators of killings of Israelis and Palestinians.

Since 7 October 2023, Israel has initiated an estimated 10,728 aerial strikes.[104] It continues to mount extensive ground operations in order to ‘seize additional areas in Gaza’[105] while expelling the population, blowing up hospitals, schools, and civilian infrastructure,[106] blockading Gaza, and cutting off humanitarian aid.[107]

By March 2025, the Palestinian death toll passed 50,000 people, over 15,000 of whom were children. Once again, an astonishing 10,000 Israeli airstrikes have been mounted in this conflict: a figure that of itself is worthy of coverage. The BBC cannot cover every strike but for those that are covered, attribution to Israel ought to be part of the normal course of reporting. Yet over 150 articles[108] about Israeli attacks did not mention the perpetrator in the headline. These included articles such as: ‘Air strike on Gaza school kills at least 15 people’[109] from 6 July 2024, which was later updated to say: ‘Israeli strike on Gaza school kills at least 15 people’.[110]

BEFORE
BBC NEWS
Air strike on Gaza school kills at least 15 people
AFTER
BBC NEWS
Israeli air strike on Gaza school kills at least 16
Shock and horror at scene of Gaza blast

104 Key figures on attacks by and against Israel since 7 October 2023, ACLED, October 2024 https://acleddata.com/2024/10/10/israels-gaza-middle-east-a-year-in-numbers/

105 Israel steps up ground ops in Gaza, threatens Hamas it will take more areas, Long War Journal, 21 March 2025, https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2025/03/israel-steps-up-ground-ops-in-gaza-threatens-hamas-it-will-take-more-areas.php

106 ‘Nowhere and no one is safe’: spatial analysis of damage to critical civilian infrastructure in the Gaza Strip during the first phase of the Israeli military campaign, Y. Asi, D. Mills, P.G. Greenough, et al., 7 October to 22 November 2023, in Conflict Health 18, 24 (2024). https://doi.org/10.1186/s13031-024-00580-x

107 Resumed Hostilities, Blocked Aid Destroying Ceasefire Gains in Gaza, Security Council Hears. United Nations, SC/1603, 18 March 2025 https://www.un.org/unispal/document/resumed-hostilities-blocked-aid-destroying-ceasefire-gains-in-gaza-security-council-hears-press-release/

108 Data derived from search of the dataset of articles.

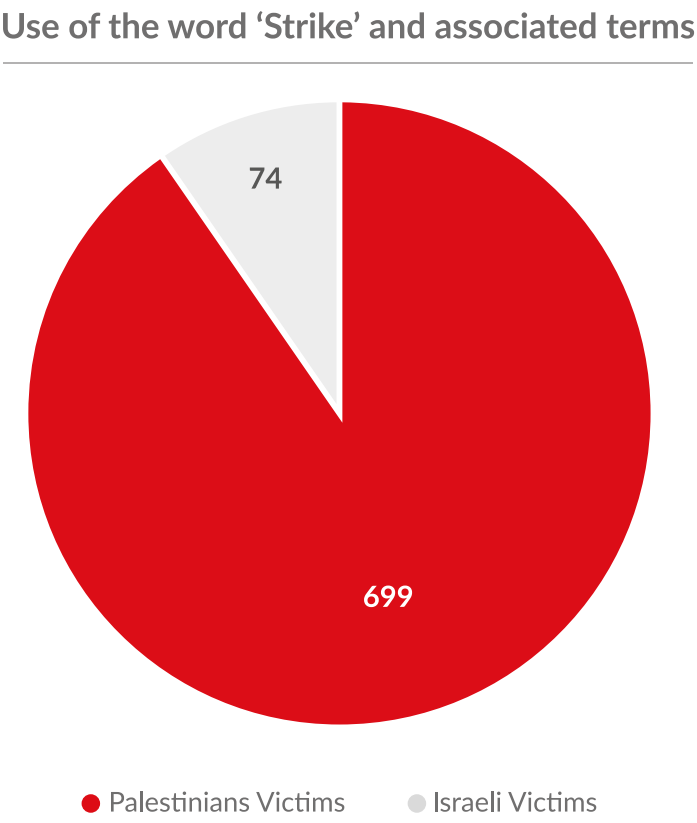
109 Air strike on Gaza school kills at least 15 people, BBC News, 6 July 2024, 17:23 https://web.archive.org/web/20240706174334/https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c4ng04kpv2do

110 Israeli air strike on Gaza school kills at least 15 people, BBC News, 6 July 2024, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c4ng04kpv2do

When the Israeli government released body cam footage from one of the attackers on 7 October 2023, the BBC published an article stating that it was done "in an effort to remind the world of the brutality of the attack on Israel two weeks ago."[111] Later in the article, reference is made to Hamas's "brutal attack on 7 October" and how this had given way to coverage of 'Israel's air strikes against Gaza according to senior ranks of Israel's military.[112]

The contrast between the violence on both sides is worth noting. The word 'brutal' is a strongly emotive adjective that conveys violence, savagery, and cruelty. It characterises Hamas's actions as deliberate, horrific, and inhumane. The term 'air strikes' in relation to Israel's attack on Gazans is a more technical and neutral military term. It describes a method of warfare rather than its effects or morality. The word does not specify consequences such as civilian casualties or destruction and does not carry the same emotional weight as 'brutal.'

Graph 10

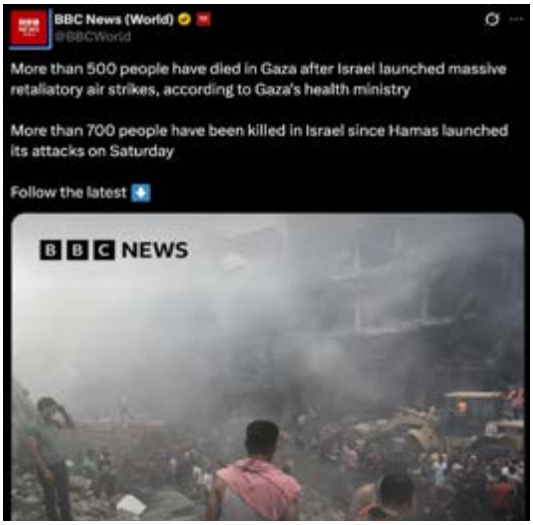


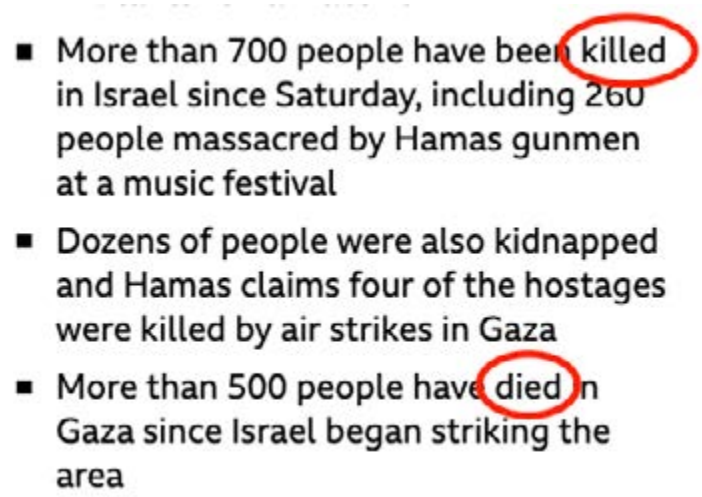
The use of neutral military terms which include the word 'strike' by the BBC shows how the terms are used more in tandem with Palestinians victims thus framing Israeli violence in more technical and less emotional or humane terms. Our Large Language Model classifier found 699 occasions where the terms such as air strikes refer to Palestinian victims and 74 occasions towards Israeli victims.[113]

111 Israel shows Hamas bodycam attack footage to journalists, BBC News. 23 October 2023, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-67198270

112 Ibid.

113 Terms include: strikes, strike, air strike, retaliatory air strikes, striking, drone strike, retaliatory strikes, artillery strikes, cross-border strikes, retaliatory airstrikes, missile strikes, bomb strike, hit by air strikes, counter-strike, strikes and counter-strikes, retaliatory cross-border strikes, drone strikes, missile strike, strike back, drone and missile strike


BBC News (World)
@BBCWorld
More than 500 people have died in Gaza after Israel launched massive retaliatory air strikes, according to Gaza's health ministry
More than 700 people have been killed in Israel since Hamas launched its attacks on Saturday
Follow the latest
BBC NEWS


More than 700 people have been killed in Israel since Saturday, including 260 people massacred by Hamas gunmen at a music festival
Dozens of people were also kidnapped and Hamas claims four of the hostages were killed by air strikes in Gaza
More than 500 people have died in Gaza since Israel began striking the area

Images: Left: Screenshot of BBC News tweet. **Right:** screenshot of linked BBC News live page. 9 October 2023.

The most frequently used term among the dataset is killed. It is used almost equally for Palestinian and Israeli victims (1167 vs 1163) despite the significantly higher numbers of people killed on the Palestinian side.

Alternatively, the use of the more passive and neutral term 'died' is used in greater numbers to refer to Palestinian victims compared with Israelis (50 vs 7). Whilst killed indicates someone caused the death of another and implies action and often violence, died indicates someone passed away, often without specifying a cause or blame.

The contrasting language can be seen within days of the conflict, on 9 October where a live feed page stated that 'more than 700 people have been killed in Israel' while 'more than 500 people have died in Gaza'.[114] The tweet drawing attention to this live page similarly states: 'more than 500 people have died in Gaza after Israel launched massive retaliatory air strikes, according to Gaza's health ministry. More than 700 people have been killed in Israel since Hamas launched its attacks on Saturday.'[115]

This analysis focuses on language which describes attacks against Israelis and Palestinians. It is notable how, when the words 'attack' or 'attacks' or someone being 'attacked', are principally used when Israelis are the victim.

In articles, Israeli victims were described as being 'attacked' or suffering an 'attack' significantly more frequently than Palestinians—with 'attack' appearing 445 times, 'attacks' 349 times, and 'attacked' 84 times in relation to Israeli victims. This linguistic choice clearly delineates aggressor and victim, framing Hamas as the perpetrator and Israel as innocent. While Hamas was clearly responsible for the 7 October attack — which the BBC appropriately attributes — the overwhelming violence subsequently meted out by the Israeli government receives no such clear attribution.

114 BBC News live page, 9 October 2023, 13:05, https://web.archive.org/web/20240101123825/https://www.bbc.com/news/news-beat-44124396

115 BBC World on X, 9 October 2023, https://x.com/BBCWorld/status/1711340677571674567

Table 4: Frequency of the use of attack and related terms

Word	Attack on Palestinians	Attack on Israelis
attack	35	445
attacks	51	349
attacked	20	84

A significant example of the use of the word 'attack' and synonyms to frame Israel as the victim is found in a BBC explainer article, 'Israel and the Palestinians: History of the conflict explained.' Whilst the article gives appropriate context, we examine the deployment of this word. Attack and its related terms are used three times in the article each time framing Israel as the victim.

On each of these occasions which describe the initial 1948 creation of Israel, the Six Day War of 1967 and the events of 7 October 2023, Israel is cast as the victim being aggressed upon by Arabs.

These are:

1. 'The day after Israel declared independence, it was **attacked** and **surrounded** by the armies of five Arab nations.'
2. 'It started when Israel, **fearing an attack by Egypt and Syria,** launched a strike on Egypt's air force.'
3. 'Days before Israel marked a year since the **7 October attacks,** UN humanitarian agencies signed a declaration demanding an end to "appalling human suffering and humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza."[116]

An earlier version of this article published on 15 November 2023 uses attack and its related terms a total of 7 times either in relation to Hamas' attack or Israel being attacked.[117]

There are also contextual omissions to these statements which we examine in Section Four, but the deployment of the word attack only in reference to Israel being the victim points to favouritism shown towards Israel through referencing attacks against its people in far larger numbers allows the occupying force (Israel) to be framed as the victim.

116 Israel and the Palestinians: History of the conflict explained, BBC News, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/newsbeat-44124396

117 Israel and the Palestinians: History of the conflict explained, 20 January 2025 https://web.archive.org/web/20240101123825/https://www.bbc.com/news/newsbeat-44124396

Another example was found the following month where the BBC initially failed to identify who the perpetrator was in the article headlined: 'Blogger who documented life in Gaza killed in strike'.[118] The article was updated later to: 'Blogger who documented life in Gaza killed in alleged Israeli strike'.[119] Yet here too, the BBC still could not bring itself to assert responsibility still using the qualifier 'alleged'.

BEFORE

AFTER

Other headlines, however, remain unchanged, for example: 'Britons killed in Gaza aid strike remembered as heroes',[120] 'Palestinians flee Gaza City's Shejaiya area amid heavy bombardment'[121] and 'Al Jazeera cameraman killed in Gaza drone strike'.[122]

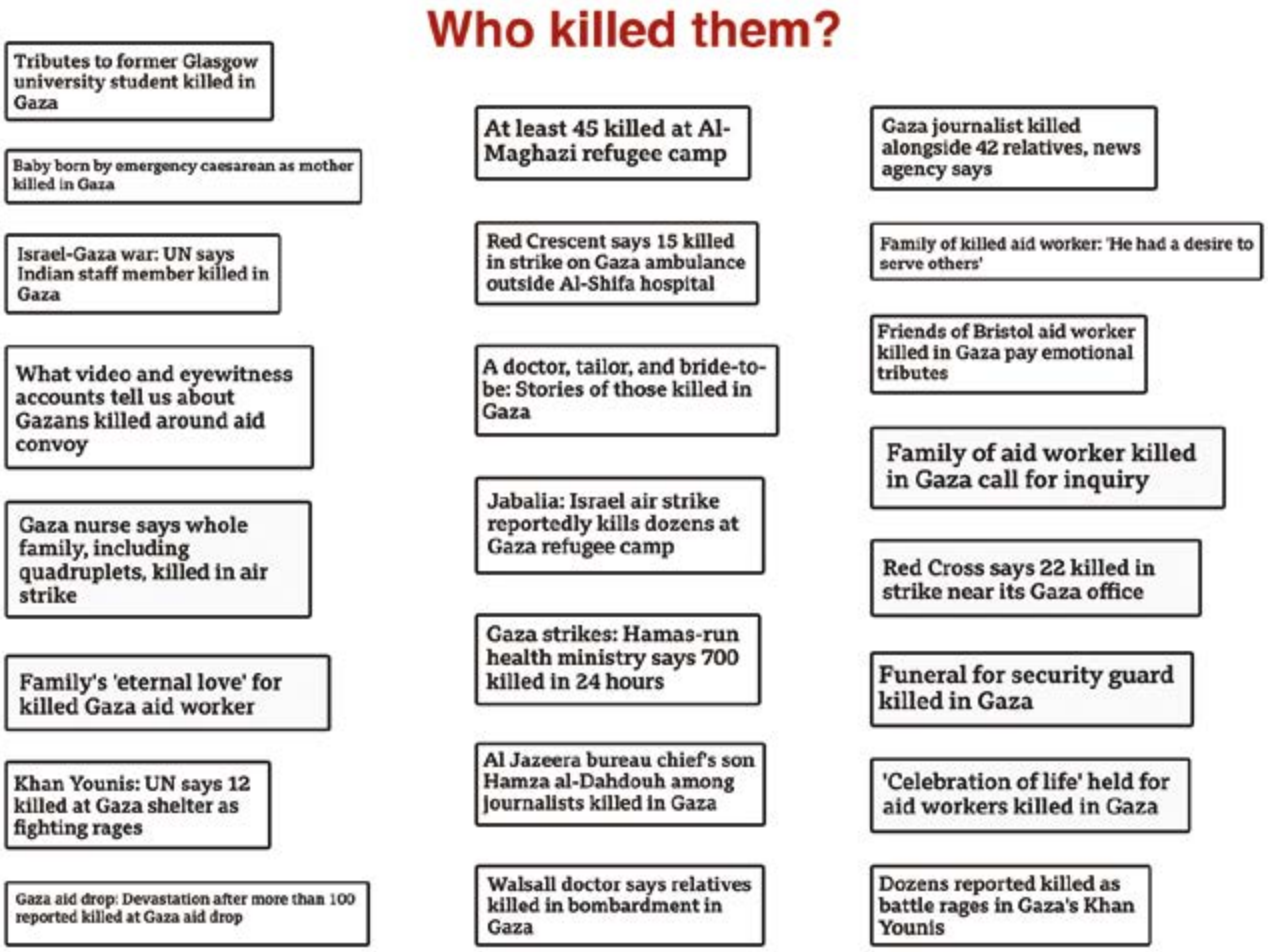
118 Blogger who documented life in Gaza killed in strike, BBC News, 29 August 2024, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cm2nyy8y48qo

119 Blogger who documented life in Gaza killed in Israeli strike, BBC News, 29 August 2024, 16:19, https://web.archive.org/web/20240829161942/https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cm2nyy8y48qo

120 'Britons killed in Gaza aid strike remembered as heroes', BBC News, 3 April 2024, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-68722758

121 Palestinians flee Gaza City's Shejaiya area amid heavy bombardment, BBC News, 27 June 2024, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c1wepdxzdy3o

122 Al Jazeera cameraman killed in Gaza drone strike, BBC News, 16 December 2023 https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-67737038


Who killed them?
Tributes to former Glasgow university student killed in Gaza
Baby born by emergency caesarean as mother killed in Gaza
Israel-Gaza war: UN says Indian staff member killed in Gaza
What video and eyewitness accounts tell us about Gazans killed around aid convoy
Gaza nurse says whole family, including quadruplets, killed in air strike
Family's 'eternal love' for killed Gaza aid worker
Khan Younis: UN says 12 killed at Gaza shelter as fighting rages
Gaza aid drop: Devastation after more than 100 reported killed at Gaza aid drop
At least 45 killed at Al-Maghazi refugee camp
Red Crescent says 15 killed in strike on Gaza ambulance outside Al-Shifa hospital
A doctor, tailor, and bride-to-be: Stories of those killed in Gaza
Jabalia: Israel air strike reportedly kills dozens at Gaza refugee camp
Gaza strikes: Hamas-run health ministry says 700 killed in 24 hours
Al Jazeera bureau chief's son Hamza al-Dahdouh among journalists killed in Gaza
Walsall doctor says relatives killed in bombardment in Gaza
Gaza journalist killed alongside 42 relatives, news agency says
Family of killed aid worker: 'He had a desire to serve others'
Friends of Bristol aid worker killed in Gaza pay emotional tributes
Family of aid worker killed in Gaza call for inquiry
Red Cross says 22 killed in strike near its Gaza office
Funeral for security guard killed in Gaza
'Celebration of life' held for aid workers killed in Gaza
Dozens reported killed as battle rages in Gaza's Khan Younis

It appears that the BBC seems to have an inbuilt posture to qualify or underplay the perpetrators of these attacks on Palestinians, certainly in its headline and framing. This is exemplified well beyond our dataset. For example, on 12 October 2024, the BBC published an article headlined 'UN condemns "large number of civilian casualties" in north Gaza.'[123] Remarkably, it seemed to have no interest in telling audiences who the casualties are or who caused them.

In a BBC Verify investigation looking into Israeli strikes within the so-called 'humanitarian zone', the headline declares: 'Gaza "humanitarian zone" struck almost 100 times since May', but we are not told by whom – employing the same passive language we have identified above. Throughout the piece, Palestinian casualties are presented with the customary 'Hamas-run' qualifiers, while granting significant space to IDF justifications and claims about targeting Hamas.[124]

It is worth noting here the wider role of the BBC's investigative priorities when it comes to reporting this conflict and allegations of genocide in this war. BBC Verify has conducted investigations on aspects of this conflict, for example with allegations of soldiers humiliating and filming Palestinian detainees which led to public apologies from the Israeli military.[125] However, we struggle to find original analysis identifying the perpetrators of the violence. With so much footage now warranting the moniker 'livestreamed genocide', it is curious that an examination of such footage is not routine, or at least warrant significant attention.

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123 UN condemns "large number of civilian casualties" in north Gaza', BBC News, 14 October 2024, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c5y5zy1vvmlo

124 Gaza 'humanitarian zone' struck almost 100 times since May, BBC Verify finds, BC News, 15 January 2025 https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cx2jld7j50eo

125 Israel to act on soldier misconduct after BBC investigation, 12 February 2024, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-68249962

Recommendations

Identify the killers: The perpetrator of violence responsible for killing civilians should be identified and named in headlines. Israeli perpetrators should always be referred to when reporting on Israeli violence.

Review language for bias: BBC should conduct regular language reviews to assess if there is a bias in its staff's use of language towards one side or party.

Ensure language reflects journalistic standards: BBC staff should receive training to identify loaded language and partisan messaging, including reviewing resources such as the Israel Project's Global Language Dictionary. This would enable them to recognise when terms serve advocacy purposes rather than journalistic objectivity.

Use active language for Palestinian victims: Passive language to describe Palestinian victims should be avoided. Palestinians are killed by Israeli action and occupation tactics, they do not just die, and the language should reflect this.

3. WHOSE VOICES ARE LOUDER?

Key Findings

- **Disparity in platforming voices:** The BBC interviewed significantly fewer **Palestinians than Israelis (1,085 v 2,350)** on TV and radio.
- **'Israeli self-defence': BBC presenters shared the Israeli perspective 11 times more frequently than the Palestinian perspective (2,340 v 217)**, even when interviewing neutral third parties like humanitarian organisations.
- **Uneven application of the "do you condemn" test:** While the BBC pressed a total of 38 interviewees to condemn Hamas's 7 October attacks, equivalent questioning to condemn Israel's actions took place **zero times**, despite Israel's actions resulting in tens of thousands of Palestinian deaths.

The BBC Editorial Guidelines are unambiguous about the broadcaster's duty to ensure fair representation of diverse viewpoints. As stated in Section 4.3.1 of the BBC Editorial Guidelines: 'Across our output as a whole, we must be inclusive, reflecting a breadth and diversity of opinion'.[126] The guidelines further emphasise that impartiality requires giving 'due weight to events, opinion and the main strands of argument'[127] in news coverage.

When dealing with controversial subjects, the BBC's own standards require that 'a wide range of significant views and perspectives are given due weight and prominence, particularly when the controversy is active'.[128]

We explore the extent to which the BBC fulfilled its obligations through the selection and approach to different voices in this conflict. In our first report on Gaza Media Bias 2023-2024,[129] we tracked how the media (including the BBC) conducted interviews by privileging Israeli government talking points. Through our dataset of over 8,000 interview clips from 7 October 2023 to 7 October 2024[130] as well as select case studies, we examine how Israeli and Palestinian perspectives are platformed, challenged, and engaged with by BBC interviewers.

The findings demonstrate an imbalance through multiple metrics: interviewing more than twice as many Israeli representatives as Palestinian ones (2,350 v 1,085), presenters amplifying Israeli talking points 11 times more frequently than Palestinian perspectives and applying disproportionate levels of scrutiny to Palestinian voices.

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126 BBC Editorial Guidelines, Section 4: Impartiality, 4.3.1 https://www.bbc.com/editorialguidelines/guidelines/impartiality/guidelines#diversityofopinion

127 Ibid. Section 4.1

128 Ibid., BBC Editorial Guidelines, Section 4.3.6

129 Media Bias Gaza 2023-24, Centre for Media Monitoring, 2024

130 The broadcast channels which are analysed are, for TV: BBC 1, BBC 2, BBC News; Radio: BBC Radio 4, BBC Radio 5 Live, BBC World Service

Moreover, the BBC has consistently shut down interviewees' allegations of genocide — occurring in over 100 documented instances (see later in this section) — and required that Palestinians condemn Hamas attacks as a precondition for speaking further. Meanwhile, Israeli representatives were never asked to condemn their government's actions, despite the far greater death toll in Gaza.

These patterns represent a serious departure from the BBC's stated commitment to impartiality. The corporation's platforming choices have created an environment where Israeli narratives receive disproportionate amplification, raising fundamental questions about the BBC's ability to provide balanced coverage of one of the most significant international conflicts of our time.

Contrasting approaches to Israeli and Palestinian voices and perspectives

Our analysis of BBC coverage reveals a stark numerical imbalance in whose voices are heard. Between 7 October 2023 and 7 October 2024, the BBC interviewed significantly fewer Palestinian representatives (1,085) compared to Israelis (2,350).[131] This 2:1 ratio in favour of Israeli perspectives creates a fundamental imbalance that shapes audience understanding of the war.

This was exemplified in a complaint (rejected by the BBC) that pointed out there were no Palestinian voices in an edition of Question Time discussing the Gaza ceasefire, even though there was a representative from the Board of Deputies of British Jews, who defended Israel's position.[132]

We do not know if this is a conscious decision by BBC executives. We are aware of allegations that, in the days after the events of 7 October, the BBC set up an internal group chat in which producers could screen potential interviewees based on their online footprint, with particular scrutiny for Palestinian guests.[133]

The lack of Palestinian representation was also clear through the diverging approach taken by BBC interviewers. We used our Large Language Model Classifier to identify Palestinian representatives and people with Palestinian nationality as well as Israeli representatives and people with Israeli nationality. Our data from 7 October 2023 to 7 October 2024 suggest that – when interviewing Palestinian representatives – BBC interviewers shared or referenced the Israeli perspective 2,340 times. Conversely, when interviewing Israeli officials, the Palestinian perspective was shared only in 217 instances. This is a striking ratio of 11:1.[134]

Even when interviewing neutral parties such as human rights groups or international bodies, presenters chose to showcase the Israeli perspective in two-thirds of cases. An interviewer is considered to share a perspective when they explicitly introduce viewpoints using phrases like 'Israel / the IDF / Israeli representatives' or 'Palestinians / Palestinian representatives' followed by verbs such as 'argue / maintain / claim / state / insist / contend / assert / believe / hold / say / declare'.

131 See Appendix 2: LLM Classification Methodology #9

132 Question Time, BBC One 2 November 2023, BBC Executive Complaints Unit, 14 February 2024, https://www.bbc.co.uk/contact/ecu/question-time-bbc-one-2-november-2023

133 Failing Gaza: Pro-Israel bias uncovered behind the lens of Western media, Al Jazeera, 5 October 2024, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/10/5/failing-gaza-pro-israel-bias-uncovered-behind-the-lens-of-western-media

134 See Appendix 2: LLM Classification Methodology #10

This data point affirms an anxiety held by many BBC journalists, who, in a joint letter, called for the 'use of consistent language when discussing both Israeli and Palestinian deaths, and robustly challenging Israeli government and military representatives in all interviews.'[135]

Here are some examples showing how BBC presenters provided Israeli perspectives when speaking with pro-Palestine (or even neutral) guests:

- BBC news anchor Maryam Moshiri asked former Israeli peace negotiator Daniel Levy: 'The Israelis would say we are defending ourselves. Targeting Hamas targets, trying to put an end to what we believe is a terrorist organisation once and for all.' To which Levy responds, 'Do you really keep a straight face when you say that?'[136]
- When former Conservative MP Crispin Blunt laid out facts that would deem Israel guilty of war crimes, the interviewer asserted: 'You will know that Israel says it is not breaking international law.'[137]
- When Sari Bashi of Human Rights Watch similarly laid out the facts saying 'The Israeli military has delayed or denied humanitarian missions to the north, actually bombed trucks bringing in aid and killed a record number of well over 100 UNRWA workers', the interviewer interrupted by saying the 'Israeli military, of course, says it has provided corridors for aid to reach where it is needed.'[138]
- When Philippe Lazzarini: the head of UNRWA again recounted the attacks on UNRWA and United Nations personnel and facilities, former BBC HARDTalk presenter Stephen Sackur posited: 'But Israel would say that in pursuit of its right to self-defence, that is its determination to root out Hamas gunmen and operatives inside Gaza, if they are embedded in your facilities, then Israel, in the end, pursuing its right of self-defence, will have to go after them. And it is clear Israel believes that, for one reason or another, UNRWA has allowed its facilities to be used or at least proximity to your facilities to be used by Hamas.'[139]
- When interviewing about Israeli strikes in the Occupied West Bank, the BBC's Martine Croxall asks political Mustapha Barghouti: 'In Gaza, the IDF says they give warnings to civilians when they are about to launch a strike. To what extent, if any, does that happen in the West Bank?'.[140]
- Interviewing analyst Maha Yahya, the Director at the Carnegie Middle East Center, BBC News anchor Samantha Simmonds asserted: 'And Israel would say Hamas, a terrorist organisation, do not operate in good faith and would not agree to release hostages who were alive'.[141]

135 Broadcaster bias is failing to hold Israel to account, The Independent, 1 November 2024, https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/letters/bbc-bias-israel-gaza-tim-davie-b2639654.html
136 BBC News channel, 11 October 2023, 10:42
137 BBC News channel, 15 October 2023, 11:18
138 BBC News channel, 18 March 2024, 14:10
139 BBC HARDTalk, 29 November 2023, https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/w3ct4nzd
140 BBC News channel, 27 August 2024, 02:12
141 BBC News channel, 15 October 2024 09:39

Beyond our dataset, the positing of Israel's perspective to Palestinian representatives continues. For example, when Gaza resident Mahmoud Rostom talks of his experience of restarting a bakery to 'end the starvation that was caused by Israel during the war', the interviewer responds: 'And of course, you will know that Israel says its policy is not one of starvation.'[142]

Conversely, there were numerous instances in which Israeli officials made unverified claims to the BBC, or used dehumanising language with regards to Palestinians, all of which were left unchallenged.

Below are a few examples:

- Most prominent amongst these were claims made by Israel's ambassador to the UK, Tzipi Hotovely, who has appeared in over 40 TV and radio appearances on the BBC. No evidence of interviewers challenging the ambassador's previously held (and well documented) extreme views about Palestinians and the conflict since 7 October 2023 were found. These incendiary omissions were highlighted in CfMM's previous report, Media Bias: Gaza 2023-24.[143] This includes describing the 'Nakba' – regarded by Palestinians as 'the catastrophe' after their forced expulsion in 1948 – as an 'Arab lie',[144] and her effective opposition to a sovereign Palestinian state: 'between the sea and the Jordan River, there needs to be one state, only the state of Israel'.[145] On BBC Newsnight, back in 2021, Hotovely was asked pointedly whether she was in favour of the two-state solution. She refused to answer definitively.[146]
- Hotovely has also been found to make claims that were subsequently debunked. For example, on 11 October 2023, she stated: 'It is so clear when children are brutally executed in front of their parents, just yesterday we exposed and it was published by the BBC that 40 bodies of babies, their heads were cut off...We have seen the bodies of those babies and children and actually this is evidence-based.'[147] Neither the Israeli government nor the IDF had verified this claim at the time, and yet Hotovely remained unchallenged.
- Similarly, the BBC platformed Idan Roll, Israel's former Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, who claimed on 17 October 2023: 'Babies were set on fire. Babies were shot in the head.'[148] This was not challenged at all.

Beyond this light touch (and unprofessional) approach, we also found that BBC interviewers quoted untrue claims made by Israeli leaders. In scrutinising Norway's recognition of Palestine, Sarah Montague asked the Norwegian Foreign Minister on 24 May, 2024: 'You'll know Israel's foreign minister has said that history will remember Spain, Norway and Ireland who decided to award a gold medal to the Hamas murderers and rapists who raped teenage girls and burned babies. How do you respond to that?'.[149]

142 BBC News channel, 29 January 2025, 14:21
143 Media Bias Gaza 2023-24, Centre for Media Monitoring, 2024, p. 55 https://cfmm.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/CfMM-Report-Final-MEDIA-BIAS-GAZA-2023-24-ePDF.pdf
144 Israeli ambassador calls Nakba an 'Arab lie', Middle East Eye, 7 December 2023 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AHYBklCUdiw
145 Op. Cit, Media Bias Gaza 2023-24, p.55
146 BBC Newsnight on X, 20 April 2021, https://x.com/BBCNewsnight/status/1384642061492686849
147 Media Bias Gaza 2023-24, Centre for Media Monitoring, 2024, p. 56
148 BBC News, 17 October 2023, 1220
149 BBC HARDtalk, various platforms https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/w3ct5sv0

The repetition of this unverified and subsequently disproved claim of burnt babies by a BBC presenter is a grave error and, in effect, a regurgitation of Israeli propaganda. We have shown in our previous report (Media Bias Gaza 2023-24) that this claim is patently false.[150]

'Do you condemn?' The uneven moral test

The BBC rightly sought to challenge Hamas about the atrocities that took place on 7 October. This is why, on 26 October 2023, correspondent Hugo Bachega asked Hamas' Ghazi Hamad: 'How do you justify killing people as they sleep, families? How do you justify killing hundreds of people?'.[151]

Yet, as we have shown, similar obligations in scrutinising Israel's conduct since 7 October 2023 have not surfaced, even though civilian atrocities carried out by the IDF far outstrip those undertaken by Hamas fighters, in both number and scale.

The imbalance can also be seen with regards to non-Hamas Palestinian voices. The data analysis reveals an imbalance: between 7 October 2023 and 7 October 2024, interviewees from a Palestinian perspective were pressed to condemn Hamas attacks of 7 October 2023 in 38 distinct instances. In stark contrast, we have found no instances where interviewees faced similar pressure to condemn Israel's actions.[152] This, despite Israel's military campaign resulting in over 40,000 Palestinian deaths (during our dataset timeline, and now, over 50,000) — actions that have prompted serious concerns from the UN, an ongoing case at the International Court of Justice, and condemnation from numerous human rights organisations.

A BBC interviewer 'asking the interviewee to condemn' occurs when the interviewer explicitly requests the interviewee using the exact word "condemn" in relation to a specific event or action. This is phrased as a direct question requiring a yes/no response, such as "Do you condemn these attacks?" rather than asking for general opinions.

The propensity to ask Palestinians to condemn the actions of Hamas on 7 October was evident from day one. One example of this is the BBC's interview with Nour Odeh – a former spokesperson of the Palestinian Authority – who appeared on the Today programme on 16 October 2023 to discuss how Palestinians were affected in the West Bank. The interviewer framed her questions around the 7 October attacks, acknowledging that: 'I know that Hamas has not been part of the Palestinian Authority, and you are not a member of Hamas, but can I ask you for your position on what they did that day?'. Odeh was repeatedly questioned about the events of that day and explicitly asked: 'can you say it was wrong?'.

Odeh's response highlights the fundamental unfairness of requiring Palestinians to condemn actions they had no part in before being allowed to speak about their own suffering: 'Why do I have to be on trial because I'm Palestinian?'[153]

150 Op. Cit, Media Bias Gaza 2023-24, p.92
151 BBC News at Six and other bulletins, 26 October 2023, 18:11
152 See Appendix 2: LLM Classification Methodology #11
153 Today, BBC Radio 4, 16 October 2023, 08:40

”Why do I have to be on trial because I’m Palestinian?”

Interviewer: ***‘Can you say [the 7 October attack] it was wrong?’***

“Well, why do I have to explain myself to you? Why do I have to be on trial because I’m Palestinian? Why do I need to justify to you? As a Palestinian, I feel that the occupation is at the core because its daily violence. I don’t think that is appropriate. I just don’t understand why this question is obsessively repeated to Palestinians, including those in Gaza who are under bombardment.

“I’m a human rights advocate. I’m a civil rights activist in my country. I do not agree with targeting civilians, but I do not feel that it is appropriate or correct or that it gives the right impression to your listeners to ask Palestinians to condemn an attack by a Palestinian group just so that they can have credibility.”

“That is not the point. And Israeli voices, including survivors of the attack on Saturday, have been muted amidst all the war mongering. They’ve been saying that war is not the answer. That they understand that this tragedy, this monstrous war that is going on will not be resolved by more firepower, by countries giving Israel more guns and more munition to kill more Palestinians.”[154]

Nour Odeh, political activist and former Palestinian Authority spokesperson

Today programme, BBC Radio 4, 16 October 2023, 08:40

Palestinians are not the only ones asked to routinely condemn Hamas’ 7 October attacks. For instance, on 16 November 2023, Jordan’s Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi was interviewed about Israel’s assault on Jordan’s field hospital which had wounded Jordanian medical personnel. During the discussion, the presenter asserted Israeli claims (frequently used to justify attacks) that Hamas operates from hospitals. When questioned about Jordan’s relationship with Hamas and whether Jordan was communicating with both Israel and Hamas, the Minister emphasised Jordan’s priorities: ‘Our priority is to stop the killing of innocent Palestinians, stop the destruction of hospitals, stop violating international law.’ The presenter immediately responded with: ‘Do you condemn Hamas’s actions?’.[155] This contrasts markedly with CNN’s approach that same day, which, while raising Israel’s claims about the attack on Jordan’s hospital, acknowledged: ‘there does seem to be an underwhelming amount of evidence to that degree’.[156]

154 Today, 16 October 2023, BBC Radio 4, 08:40
155 BBC News channel, 16 November 2023, 16:07
156 Becky Anderson, Instagram, 16 November 2023, https://www.instagram.com/beckycnn/reel/CzuBqlpS0oY/

On 29 November 2023, Stephen Sackur of the now defunct BBC HARDTalk programme puts to Jasem Albudaiwi, the Secretary General of the Gulf Cooperation Council, the following point: 'It's more than seven weeks since Hamas's murderous assault on southern Israel on October 7th and, as far as I can see, only two of your six member nations of the GCC have actually come out with a clear, explicit condemnation of what Hamas did.' Albudaiwi responds by stating 'We say that quite clear, we condemn every action against civilians, no matter what their religion, citizenship, colour and gender.'[157]

In our dataset between 7 October 2023 to 7 October 2024, we found no similar examples asking for condemnation for Israel's military action in Palestine, in the same way that Palestinians and others are asked to condemn the attacks of 7 October 2023. BBC journalists have also expressed concerns about the lack of compassion shown to Palestinian guests, leading to some BBC journalists being reluctant to put guests in front of an interviewer, as reported by Al Jazeera.[158]

BBC interviewers and allegations of genocide and war crimes

The BBC's visceral reluctance to acknowledge or even listen to accusations of genocide is best reflected in broadcast interviews. **We have identified over 100 interviews where the interviewer proactively shuts down any assertions of a genocide taking place.**[159] This despite the BBC's guidance that 'there is no view on any subject which must be excluded as a matter of principle (p.46, Section 4.3.3). This systematic imbalance raises serious questions about whether the BBC is truly achieving the 'due impartiality' to which it is committed.

In this framework, a BBC interviewer 'challenging' an interviewee's genocide claim means the interviewer directly questions or pushes back against the use of the term 'genocide'.

Here are examples that take us through the year, from 7 October 2023 to 7 October 2024:

- UN Special Rapporteur Francesca Albanese raised the flag of a potential genocide taking place on BBC Newsnight at the end of October 2023. Presenter Kirsty Wark stated that '**genocide is not what is happening here**',[160] before turning the statement into a supposed question.
- On 23 October 2023, when British-Palestinian campaigner Karim Ali asserted 'this is a genocide taking place in front of our eyes', presenter Lucy Hocking immediately shut down the discussion, countering that '**that word, as you say, is incredibly emotive and the Israelis, as you know, will be saying that they are targeting Hamas only'.** Despite Ali offering evidence for his claim, Hocking moved to end the interview with a clear disclaimer: 'I do need to make the qualification of course that **it is always denied by the Israelis that genocide is taking place**, they say these are strategic planned strikes in Gaza and that they are targeting the militant group Hamas.' When Ali attempted to respond — 'But I am here to let the world know that that is not the case' — Hocking curtly dismissed him: 'You have been able to have your say, this is what the Israelis will say in response to that.'[161]

157 BBC HARDtalk, 29 November 2023, 22:30 GMT, also at https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m001t1ly
158 Inside Western media's reporting on Gaza, The Listening Post, Al Jazeera, 4 October 2024, 18:53 mins to 19:36 mins, https://youtu.be/UAmk4efA2t0?si=dxcVMI-Lubdnp7FZ
159 Based on desk research of filtered transcripts.
160 Kirsty Walk to Francesca Albanese, Newsnight, BBC2, 30 October 2023, 22:52
161 BBC News channel, 23 October 2023, 12:43

- When Muhannad Ayyash analyst mentioned on 29 October the word genocide, the anchor interjected: '**To pick up on you said it was genocidal, the term genocide is a very specific, very powerful word…Do you think it is justified?**'. When Ayyash gave examples, proof and context, the anchor said: 'Just to push back on you again, we have to remember this war was triggered by the events of October 7. When 1,400 Israelis were killed, Israel had 229 hostages they had to think about.'[162]

- In an interview with a Liberal Democrat politician on 8 November 2023, Today programme presenter Nick Robinson asked: '**Is that acceptable to say that Israel committed genocide** as one of your party in the House of Lords previously frontbench spokesman Baroness Hussein? She has done. She accused Israel of genocide. She shared a quote describing Israel's settler colonial goal is to erase Palestine and millions of Palestinians. Can you be in the Liberal Democrats and have those views?'[163]

- In Section Five of this report, we discussed the BBC's underreporting of genocidal intent, particularly the comment of former Israeli defence minister Yoval Gallant who likened Gazans to **'human animals'** and declared measures that were akin to genocidal intent. On 3 January 2024, an interviewee drew that link saying 'the Israeli regime itself is showing genocidal intent. **We've already seen the defense minister speak about Palestinians being human animals in Gaza. We've seen the Israeli president say that there are no innocents in Gaza. So I think it's quite clear that this is a genocide.' The interviewer quickly interjects: 'It would not be clear to all. I just have to be specific about that.'**[164]

- When accusations of genocide were formally discussed at the International Court of Justice, Human Rights Watch Israel and Palestine Director Omar stated: 'Just yesterday the International Court of Justice found it plausible that Israel is committing genocide in part because of their deprivation of critical aid and food to civilian population of Gaza.' He made the comment as part of a wider analysis on Israel's attack on humanitarian activities. The instant response from the BBC presenter was: '**to be clear, Israel has vehemently denied any intention or any actions involving genocidal intent.**'[165]

- When Mustafa Barghouti was again on the BBC News channel on 11 April 2024, he was asked by anchor Samantha Simmonds: 'how can we stop everything?', to which Barghouti responded 'It is very simple, stop the war in Gaza, stop Palestinian genocide.' Then came the response from Simmonds: '**Israel would deny that genocide is taking place and that it is defending its right to exist.** There are two sides to this, there are Hamas who hold more than 200 hostages and Israel's determination to wipe out Hamas.'[166]

- On 29 August 2024, academic Dalal Iriqat argued: 'Under international law, what is today are war crimes. They are being sued for possibility of genocide, the ICC is about to issue arrest warrants against Israeli war criminals.' Finishing off the interview, and giving no possibility for Iriqat to respond, anchor Annita McVeigh said: 'Of course, **a reminder that Israel would deny that it is carrying out war crimes in this situation**.' Professor Iriqat can be heard protesting this assertion before being cut off.[167]

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162 BBC News channel, 29 October 2023, 05:23
163 Today programme, BBC Radio 4, 8 November 2023, 06:56
164 BBC News channel, 3 January 2024, 21:13
165 BBC News channel, 28 January 2024, 04:08
166 BBC News channel, 11 April 2024, 12:07
167 BBC News channel, 29 August 2024, 16:11

- On 2 October 2024, BBC Radio 5 talk show host Nicky Campbell went out of his way to counter various callers' criticism of Israel by saying 'others would say that this is a battle against theocratic fascism and sponsor of international terrorism and **genocide is a misapplied term**'.[168]
- In an interview with Rami Mortada, the Lebanese Ambassador to the UK on 3 October 2024, the Today programme's Emma Barnett was insistent in having the last word by countering, saying: **'you say a genocide was started on October 7th** (referring to Israel's attack on Gaza)**. October 7th was of course the day when there was the biggest attack on Jewish lives since the Holocaust**. I think it's a particular point to put into that particular context'.[169] The same presenter did not offer a similar challenge to the Israeli ambassador, interviewed the day before: where she ended the interview courteously and without cutting her off. The disparity was the subject of a BBC complaint, which 'suggested bias in favour of Israel'. The complaint alleging a failure to be impartial was duly rejected. And yet, in another complaint, again involving the disparate treatment of the Lebanese Ambassador a year earlier, the BBC's Editorial and Complaints Unit said: 'When interviewing public figures on controversial matters it is standard practice to put opposing views to them for comment' – clearly not, though, for the Israeli ambassador and many other Israeli figures.[170]

We are presenting here a pattern that begs the question: are BBC presenters obliged to uncritically present denials on behalf of the Israel government? This imbalanced line of questioning can be seen well before 7 October 2023. For example, On 26 July 2023, Stephen Sackur pointedly asked Agnès Callamard, secretary general of Amnesty International: **'Is it representative of your impartiality to consistently call Israel an apartheid state?'**[171]

It is also worth noting that we found references to genocide made by Israeli or pro-Israeli interviewees in 62 interviews.[172] None were challenged. They were usually in relation to Hamas' attack on 7 October, or to point to Hamas' founding charter (though in one interview, military analyst Professor Michael Clarke conceded they dropped the genocidal elements in 2017). Others, such as Jerusalem deputy mayor, Fleur Hassan-Nahoum talked about dismantling 'the genocidal regime that runs Gaza since 2005 that has created all this tragedy for its own people.'[173] It was Hassan-Nahoum, a month later, apparently in justification for Israel's continued attacks on a Gaza church, who would go on to claim that there were no Christians or churches in Gaza.[174]

Recent examples of shutting down assertions of Palestinians facing plausible genocide continue to 2025: on 15 January 2025, when a Palestinian interviewee stated that: 'preservation of life is the number one priority, and after 15 months of genocidal assault, treating the injured, the starving, those in need of medical attention, mental health care, and the recovery of countless bodies buried under more than 42 million tonnes of rubble is absolutely essential' – interviewer Matthew Amroliwala responded by saying: '**I don't want to go down the avenue of genocide,** we know about the case being brought, we know what Israel has said disputing that, let's just stick to where we are today'.[175]

Overall, there is overwhelming evidence that reveals the BBC's reluctance to air views that Israel is committing genocide.

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168 Nicky Campbell, BBC Radio 5 Live, 1 October 2024, 09:00-12:00 https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m0023g2f

169 Today, BBC Radio 4, 3 October 2024, 07:17

170 The World at One, Radio 4, 3 November 2023, BBC Editorial and Complaints Unit, 18 January 2024, https://www.bbc.co.uk/contact/ecu/the-world-at-one-radio-4-3-november-2023

171 Stephen Sackur, BBC HARDtalk, 26 July 2023

172 Found through desk research of filtered transcripts.

173 BBC News channel, 11 November 2023, 10:09

174 No Christians in Gaza, claims Jerusalem deputy mayor after Israeli army kills two women at church, LBC, 19 December 2023 https://www.lbc.co.uk/news/no-christians-church-gaza-jerusalem-deputy-mayor-israeli-army-kills-two/

175 BBC News channel, 15 January 2025, 17:52 GMT

Platforming hardline pro-Israel advocates

The BBC's editorial decision to regularly provide a platform for voices that employ dehumanising (and often Islamophobic) rhetoric toward Palestinians raises questions about the consistency of its editorial standards. Critics question whether the corporation would extend similar unscrutinised access to those expressing antisemitic views — a practice that would rightfully be condemned.

Most prominent amongst these voices is The Times' columnist, Melanie Phillips, someone who has denied even that the Palestinians exist as a people. Speaking at the Jewish News Syndicate International Policy Summit in April 2025, Phillips claimed 'there is no such thing as the Palestinians' and that 'anyone who supports the Palestinian cause is supporting Nazi style demonisation of the Jews, ethnic cleansing and genocide.'[176]

For over a decade, Phillips has been a frequent contributor to BBC programmes, appearing on The Moral Maze and being one of the top non-party political panellists on BBC Question Time. After 7 October, Phillips appeared on Question Time on 14 March 2024,[177] generating widespread criticism when she denied the existence of famine in Gaza despite contradictory reports from reputable international organisations. During this contentious exchange, Phillips claimed that reports of food shortages in Gaza were 'distorted and so untrue.'

When discussing humanitarian aid, Phillips asserted that 'there have been hundreds and hundreds of trucks going through Gaza' and claimed food was 'being stolen by Hamas.' When challenged on this point, Phillips suggested viewers could 'go on YouTube and see pictures of stocked food markets in Gaza,' a comment that elicited laughter from the audience.

Host Fiona Bruce challenged Phillips by pointing out that 'the UN says that not enough trucks are being allowed in and that children are dying of starvation.' In response, Phillips claimed the UN was 'entirely compromised' due to having operatives who were 'members of Hamas.'

A complaint was lodged with the BBC about Phillips' appearance on Question Time, but the BBC defended her inclusion, stating they had 'dedicated a lot of time on the programme to discussing the war, hearing a broad range of perspectives' and that Fiona Bruce 'made sure that Ms Phillips was appropriately challenged.'[178]

Another frequent BBC guest is Fleur Hassan-Nahoum, the Deputy Mayor of Jerusalem, who has appeared on BBC platforms at least 37 times since 7 October. As stated earlier, she became infamous in an interview about Israel's bombing of a church in Gaza that killed two women in December 2023. When challenged about reports of snipers outside a church in Gaza, Hassan-Nahoum responded: 'The church? There are no churches in Gaza…Yes, unfortunately there are no Christians because they were driven out by Hamas.' This statement was made despite Liberal Democrat MP Layla Moran confirming that her own Christian relatives were sheltering in that very church compound at the time.[179]

176 Melanie Phillips addresses the JNS International Policy Summit, 29 April 2025 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eodG-yJ3Qyc

177 BBC Question Time, BBC One, 14 March 2024, 22:40

178 Question Time, Melanie Phillips comments on Israel-Gaza war, BBC One, 14 March 2024 https://www.bbc.co.uk/contact/complaint/melaniephillipsquestiontime

179 No Christians in Gaza, claims Jerusalem deputy mayor after Israeli army kills two women at church, LBC, 19 December 2023, https://www.lbc.co.uk/news/no-christians-church-gaza-jerusalem-deputy-mayor-israeli-army-kills-two/

In April 2025, BBC Newsnight conducted a one-on-one interview with the polemicist and staunch pro-Israel advocate Douglas Murray.[180] Despite Murray's extreme views on Muslims and Gaza, he was given an eight-minute prime-time platform where his comments on Gaza went largely unchallenged. In particular, the interviewer made no mention of his extreme views, such as a Spectator article after 7 October wherein Murray wrote: 'The Israelis will respond as they see fit – it isn't for non-Israelis to give them advice. Maybe Israel will cut off Gaza and starve Hamas out…Or maybe they will finally put an end to this insoluble nightmare, raze Hamas to the ground, or clear all the Palestinians from that benighted strip…It could be a good time to do it.'[181]

During the Newsnight interview, Murray told BBC political editor Nick Watt that people who attend the UK protests against Israel's war on Gaza 'support the death cult [Hamas who] would murder Jews and the rest of us next.' These comments went unchallenged by Watt, who thanked Murray for being interviewed. After Murray's segment, TV presenter Matthew Stadlen appeared on the programme and criticised the BBC for platforming what he called an 'extremist', pointing out that Murray had previously said Scottish-born Humza Yousaf, former First Minister of Scotland, 'infiltrated the British political system' and called him the 'First Minister of Gaza.' At no point during the interview did we hear that Murray was also an embed with the IDF during Israel's war on Gaza.[182]

As stated in 'Media Bias: Gaza 2023-24', Richard Kemp, a retired colonel with a history of anti-Muslim and anti-Palestine rhetoric, made numerous appearances across BBC platforms while being introduced simply as a 'former officer and terrorism expert who sat on the government's Joint Intelligence Committee.' Research from the London-based charity 'Action on Armed Violence' found at least 80 articles in UK and international media outlets that cited Kemp's opinion on Israel's war on Gaza since 7 October without making it clear that he heads the UK Friends of the Association for the Wellbeing of Israel's Soldiers, a charity funded by the IDF.

Kemp appeared on multiple BBC programmes including BBC News, BBC Radio 5 Live, BBC Verified Live, and BBC Newsnight from October 2023 onwards. During these appearances, he consistently defended Israeli military actions, claiming 14 October 2023 on BBC Radio 5 Live that 'killing innocent civilians in this situation, although it must be avoided if it can be, that is not a war crime' and that Israel 'does all it can to minimise civilian casualties.'

The BBC's decision to platform these voices without appropriate context or challenge raises serious concerns about its commitment to impartiality and balanced reporting on Israel's war on Gaza.

180 BBC Newsnight, 17 April 2025, 22:30

181 Britain must stand up against those who support Hamas, Spectator, 14 October 2023 https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/britain-must-stand-up-against-those-who-support-hamas/

182 A Dangerous Moment, With Douglas Murray, Uncommon Knowledge, Hoover Institution, 4 January 2024, https://www.hoover.org/research/dangerous-moment-douglas-murray

Recommendations

Balance spokesperson representation: Interview Palestinian representatives at a ratio proportionate to Israeli ones, ensuring audiences hear diverse perspectives, including Israeli dissenting voices.

Equalise treatment of narratives: Fact check claims made by Israeli interviewees and be consistent by presenting Palestinian perspectives to Israeli representatives in the same way as Israeli claims are presented to Palestinian interviewees.

Don't suppress discussions: Permit discussions of genocide, apartheid, and war crimes based on evidence rather than systematically shutting down such mentions.

Challenge all extreme rhetoric: Apply equal scrutiny to dehumanising language from all sources, including regular guests who express anti-Palestinian sentiments.

Full disclosure of guests: When featuring commentators with strong pro-Israel advocacy records, disclose their affiliations and past statements to ensure audiences can assess their perspectives.

End condemnation prerequisites: Abolish the practice of requiring Palestinian interviewees to condemn violence before being allowed to discuss their experiences or perspectives, especially as Israeli officials are rarely asked to condemn what many are describing as the 'live-streamed genocide'.

Challenge misinformation and false claims: Apply rigorous fact-checking to claims from all sides, particularly from Israeli officials with a documented history of spreading falsehoods.

Diversify expert voices: Broaden the pool of commentators to include more Palestinian academics, analysts and human rights experts rather than relying predominantly on Western or Israeli sources.

4. TELLING THE FULL STORY

Key Findings

- **7 October as the 'starting point':** The 7 October attacks were referenced in at least **40%** of the BBC's online coverage. Yet only **0.5%** of articles referenced any historical or contemporary context, namely: Israel's occupation and violence against Palestinians in the months, years and decades before 7 October, as documented by many organisations, such as the UN and Amnesty International.
- **History erased from reporting:** The BBC only mentioned **'occupation' 14 times** in news articles when providing context to 7 October (0.3% of articles); '**blockade' 3 times** (0.08%), and **'settlements' just once** (0.03%) – while across TV/radio, 'occupation' appeared in **only 33 clips** (0.3%), **'blockade' in 20** (0.2%), and **'settlements' in 8** (0.07%).
- **Strategic contextual omission:** Despite being essential context for understanding the 7 October attack, Palestinian fatalities of Israeli violence (pre-7 October) appeared in **just 1 article (0.03%)**, references to international law violations in **just 1 article (0.03%)**, and Palestinian expulsions-from-homes in **just 1 article (0.03%)**.
- **Apartheid reality obscured:** Despite numerous human rights organisations identifying Israel's policies as apartheid, **only 2% of articles** mentioned the term, thereby concealing a crucial framework through which to understand the structural nature of Israel's current war on Gaza and Palestine more generally.
- **Military doctrine blackout:** In its coverage of Gaza, the BBC **completely omitted** Israeli military doctrines like the **Dahiya Doctrine** (deliberate targeting of civilian infrastructure) and the **Hannibal Directive** (risking hostages' lives to prevent captures), despite these being essential for understanding Israeli operations.

The BBC talks of its 'special responsibility' to its audiences when 'reporting conflict including wars, acts of terror, sieges and other emergencies.' It recognises that people 'across the world access our services for trustworthy news and information. They expect us to provide context and analysis and to offer a wide range of views and opinions.'[183]

This section examines how effectively the BBC has fulfilled these obligations in its coverage of Israel's war on Palestine. Since 1967, Palestinian land has been taken through settlement expansion, illegal under international law (and something that the UK government also deems as illegal), a stifling economy, while hopes for a political solution steadily diminish.

183 BBC Editorial Guidelines, War, Terror and Emergencies, Section 11.1

The importance of this crucial context was highlighted by UN Secretary-General António Guterres, who emphasised that the attacks 'did not happen in a vacuum.' Speaking to the U.N Security Council in late 2023, he highlighted how they emerged from '56 years of suffocating occupation'.[184] This important statement did not feature in BBC's online coverage until the Israeli government demanded the Secretary-General's resignation for stating this fact.[185]

This section analyses the BBC's ability to tell the full story in two parts: first, we track mentions of 7 October in BBC content and then to check whether the BBC provides adequate historical and contemporary context to help audiences understand the complex dynamics underlying current events.

Was 7 October ground zero?

To measure what degree of historical context was provided for 7 October, seven key categories have been examined:

1. The expulsion of Palestinians from their homes in 1948
2. The occupation of Palestinian territories since 1967
3. Israeli settlements in the Occupied Territories
4. Violations of international law
5. The practice of detention without trial
6. The ongoing blockade of Gaza since 2007
7. Casualties prior to 7 October 2023

Of 3,873 articles analysed, only 18 (less than 0.5%) provided any historical context for 7 October.[186]

- The occupation was referenced as context 14 times
- The Gaza blockade twice
- The remaining factors - expulsion, settlements, international law violations, detention practices, and prior casualties - were each mentioned only once.

184 António Guterres, Secretary-General's remarks to the Security Council - on the Middle East, 24 October 2023, https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2023-10-24/secretary-generals-remarks-the-security-council-the-middle-east%C2%A0

185 Israel demands UN chief resign over Hamas attack comments, 25 October 2023, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-67215620

186 See Appendix 2: LLM Classification Methodology #12. All subsequent references to the data regarding historical context in articles are explained here.

In broadcast coverage, from 23,618 segments, we examined mentions of the seven contextual factors by BBC reporters and presenters in a non-interview setting. The results showed similar patterns:

- Occupation was mentioned 33 times
- The Gaza blockade 20 times
- Settlements 8 times
- Palestinian expulsion 7 times
- Prison practices and pre-October casualties were each mentioned once.
- International law violations were not referenced as context for 7 October at all.[187]

Table 5: Points of Context Picked Up by the BBC

Mentions	Online	Broadcast
	Out of 3,873 online articles	Out of 23,618 broadcast segments
Palestinian expulsion in 1948	1	7
Occupation since 1967	14	33
Israeli settlements	1	8
Violations of international law	1	0
Blockade of Gaza	2	20
Detention of prisoners without trial	1	1
Pre-7 October casualties	1	1

187 See Appendix 2: LLM Classification Methodology #13. All subsequent references to the data regarding historical context in broadcasts are explained here.

In those early weeks when context was crucial to explain events, there were many examples where the context behind 7 October was omitted. On 15 October 2023, the BBC published an online explainer for young audiences titled 'Israel and Hamas: What's happening?' It simply stated that 'Israel left Gaza in 2005'[188] without any explanation of the ongoing occupation or blockade that followed – restricting the movement of people and goods including medical supplies, food, educational material, fuel and electricity.

In broadcasts, we see BBC interviewers quite clearly treating the events of 7 October as the only legitimate framing for this conflict.

On 16 October 2023, Nour Odeh – a former spokesperson of the Palestinian Authority – went on the Today programme to talk about how Palestinians were affected in the West Bank.

The interviewer then asked:

> "That's the context from your perspective, but from the context of the Israeli perspective, October the 7th is absolutely central to why they feel as they do now".

Odeh responds: ***'I would rather spend the valuable time we have giving your audience context. I think we need to understand that in terms of the news, [7 October is] how this story started...2 million Palestinians have been under lock and key, under an Israeli blockade in Gaza, under bombardment, five different, large-scale assaults that have left thousands dead and injured. The fact that in the West Bank, the daily, the crushing daily reality of occupation does not let up. Yeah. It's an everyday struggle.'***[189]

These interviews are looked at more closely in Section Three.

Another example can be cited from 29 October 2023, when Professor Muhannad Ayyash attempted to explain the broader context of Palestinian suffering during a BBC News interview. The presenter interrupted him, insisting 'we have to remember that this war was triggered by the events of 7 October' – effectively dismissing decades of history that preceded the attacks.[190]

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188 Israel and Hamas: What's happening? BBC Newsround, 9 October 2023 https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/67051424
189 Today, BBC Radio 4, 16 October 2023, 08:40
190 BBC News channel, 29 October 2023, 05:22

By mid-November 2023, with Palestinian casualties exceeding 10,000, the BBC's coverage continued to frame events primarily through the lens of 7 October. This is best illustrated in an article from 23 November 2023, which stated simply: 'The conflict began when Gaza-based gunmen from Hamas attacked southern Israel on 7 October, killing about 1,200 people and taking about 240 others hostage.'[191]

We find the BBC's difficulty in addressing context is reflected in a BBC Newsbeat explainer about the conflict, entitled 'Israel and the Palestinians: History of the conflict explained'.[192] While the article does provide historical background and acknowledges some crucial contextual points needed to understand the conflict, its overall approach to contextualising events remains problematic. The article presents key historical moments — including the 1948 war, 1967 conflict, and 7 October 2023 — in isolation from the broader context of occupation and Palestinian dispossession. As we explore further in Section Two through an analysis of the language deployed, the article presents Israel primarily as the victim of 'attacks' (a term used only in relation to Israel defending itself) whilst omitting or failing to acknowledge key historical events that provide essential context.

Missing contextual elements for 7 October

The expulsion of Palestinians/occupation of Palestine

In our analysis, the expulsion (or Nakba) of Palestinians was mentioned in only one online article (out of 3,873) and 27 broadcast clips (out of 21,913) in a way that provided context for 7 October.

Meanwhile, the occupation was mentioned in only 14 online articles (out of 3,873) and 33 broadcast clips (out of 21,612) in a way that provided context for 7 October.

The state of Israel was created in 1948 when around 750,000 Palestinians were displaced, in an event known to Palestinians as the 'Nakba' or 'catastrophe'. The West Bank and Gaza have been occupied since 1967. These are acknowledged in the article mentioned above when it states that 'Palestinians fled, or were forced from, their homes on land which became Israel and ended up as refugees', but not before the contentious statement that '[The] day after Israel declared independence, it was attacked and surrounded by the armies of five Arab nations.'

This occupation since 1967 has led to widespread human rights abuses, displacement of Palestinians, and the expansion of illegal settlements.[193] Countless UN resolutions see Israel as the occupying power under the Geneva Convention.

In one example where this context of occupation existed, a BBC article reporting on the Israeli killing of a Palestinian child, correctly referred to the killing taking place in 'occupied West Bank', it also reminded us that 'there has been a spike in violence in the West Bank since Hamas's deadly attack on Israel on 7 October and the ensuing war in Gaza.'[194] The headline did not tell us directly who killed the girl, and the article omitted mention that Israelis or settlers have increased their attacks on Palestinians since 7 October, nor was there any mention of Israel's historic occupation preceding this date or the deadly and daily violence experienced by Palestinians for decades before this.

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191 Melissa Barrera: Actress fired from Scream 7 over Israel-Gaza posts, BBC News, 23 November 2023, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-67494374

192 Israel and the Palestinians: History of the conflict explained, BBC News, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/newsbeat-44124396

193 Israel's Occupation: 50 Years Of Dispossession, Amnesty International, 7 June 2017, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2017/06/israel-occupation-50-years-of-dispossession/

194 Girl 'killed inside home' as Israeli West Bank operation continues, BBC News, 4 September 2024, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cpdl3veg1l4o

BBC
NEWS
Girl 'killed inside home' as Israeli West Bank operation continues

In a briefing from December 2023 on Hamas' support in the West Bank, the article's photo credit references the 'Occupied West Bank', but there is no reference to the occupation itself within the article.[195] The author wrote 'more than 270 people have been killed by Israeli forces in the West Bank since Hamas attacked Israel on 7 October – including 70 children – according to the UN. Four Israelis – including three from the armed forces – have been killed by Palestinians there in the same period.' Whilst the article refers to previous intifadas triggered by Israel; there is no mention of accompanying historic context of occupation.

By contrast, an AFP article of yet another killing in the West Bank in June 2024 stated that the 'West Bank, which Israel has occupied since 1967, has for more than a year experienced a rise in deadly incidents, but particularly since the Israel-Hamas war erupted on October 7', and that 'Israel has carried out near-daily raids in the West Bank in what it says is a bid to thwart militant groups.'[196]

The historical backdrop of the expulsions of Palestinians from their land remains central to understanding contemporary grievances and claims. The expulsion of Palestinians is a violation of international law,[197] particularly the Fourth Geneva Convention, which prohibits the forcible transfer of populations in occupied territories.[198]

One example of where this is referenced is in Jeremy Bowen's contextual explanation of the conflict: 'More than 700,000 Palestinians fled or were forced from their homes at gunpoint by the Israelis, events referred to by Palestinians as al Nakba - the catastrophe. The descendants of the 1948 refugees include much of the population of the Gaza Strip.': 'More than 700,000 Palestinians fled or were forced from their homes at gunpoint by the Israelis, events referred to by Palestinians as al Nakba - the catastrophe. The descendants of the 1948 refugees include much of the population of the Gaza Strip.'[199]

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195 Lucy Williamson: Hamas support soars in West Bank - but full uprising can still be avoided, BBC News, 16 December 2023, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-67708116

196 Palestinians Say Israeli Troops Kill Teen In West Bank, Barrons, via AFP, 20 June 2024, https://www.barrons.com/news/palestinians-say-israeli-troops-kill-teen-in-west-bank-b7b46b31

197 United Nations Security Council Resolution Number 242 (1967) and Number 2334 (2016), https://docs.un.org/S/RES/2334(2016)

198 Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, Fourth Geneva Convention, 12 August 1949, Article 49, https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/atrocity-crimes/Doc.33_GC-IV-EN.pdf

199 Israel-Gaza: Why this war is different to the others, BBC News, 13 November 2023, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-67404110

For some time now, many human rights organisations have observed that Palestinians are living under a regime of apartheid in all the occupied Palestinian territories. People who have experienced apartheid say as much. The late Desmond Tutu stated:

> ‘I know first-hand that Israel has created an apartheid reality within its borders and through its occupation. The parallels to my own beloved South Africa are painfully stark indeed.’[200]

And the late US President Jimmy Carter has said:

> ‘Israel’s rule in the West Bank is a horrendous example of apartheid.’[201]

In 2022, BBC itself reported Amnesty International’s report that said:

‘Israeli laws, policies and practices against Palestinians in Israel and the occupied territories amount to apartheid’, though it foregrounded the report with furious denunciations from the Israeli government.[202]

Out of our overall 3,873 article dataset, the word ‘apartheid’ appeared in only 52, the majority of those reporting on protests and controversy around social media posts referencing Israel’s apartheid.[203]

200 Presbyterian General Assembly Biennial Meeting: My Message on Israel and Palestine, Huffington Post, 16 August 2014, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/presbyterian-general-assembly_b_5499395

201 Hardball with Chris Matthews, MSNBC, 29 November 2006, https://www.nbcnews.com/id/wbna15951792

202 Israeli policies against Palestinians amount to apartheid - Amnesty, BBC News, 1 February 2022, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-60197918

203 Identified through a keyword search of the dataset.

As described in Section Three of this report, the BBC's hostility to any use of the term 'apartheid' in the Israeli context was highlighted in an interview on BBC HardTalk, when then BBC presenter Stephen Sackur asked the head of Amnesty International Agnès Callamard: 'Is it representative of your impartiality to consistently call Israel an apartheid state?'[204]

The term is correctly and appropriately applied in an article describing far-right settler activity in the West Bank, citing the International Court of Justice: 'The top UN court – the International Court of Justice – has described the Israeli occupation as "de-facto annexation" and in breach of the Convention on the Eradication of Racial Discrimination which condemns "racial segregation and apartheid".'[205]

Gaza blockade

In the dataset of BBC content between 7 October 2023 and 7 October 2024, the Gaza blockade was covered in only two online articles and 20 broadcast clips in a way that provided context for 7 October.

The Israeli blockade of Gaza is crucial contextual information for understanding the situation faced by Palestinians prior to October 2023. Israel and its advocates often argue that Gaza is an independent entity, invoking the right to self-defence to justify military actions and to disclaim responsibilities typically associated with an occupying power.[206] Yet, legal scholars, human rights groups, and the International Court of Justice argue otherwise. They contend that Israel's control over Gaza's airspace, territorial waters, and land crossings, as well as its influence over key civilian infrastructure, constitutes effective occupation under international law.[207]

That Gaza has been consistently under Israeli military occupation since 1967, is also the view of the United Kingdom government. The BBC's coverage of Israel's effective occupation of Gaza therefore merits scrutiny.

Even as recently as February 2025, the BBC's shortcomings in this regard were apparent. In an interview conducted by Samantha Simmonds on 8 February, the BBC news anchor said:

> **'Israel, as you know, withdrew from Gaza in the early 2000s'.**

204 BBC Hardtalk, BBC News Channel and iPlayer, 26 July 2023

205 Confronting violent settlers in the occupied West Bank, together, 9 August 2024, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cnd0e5w7l96o

206 The State informed the High Court that it has no intention of remaining in Gaza, Zman Yisrael, 13 September 2024, https://www.zman.co.il/519716

207 For one example see: Experts hail ICJ declaration on illegality of Israel's presence in the occupied Palestinian territory as "historic" for Palestinians and international law 30 July 2024 https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/07/experts-hail-icj-declaration-illegality-israels-presence-occupied

The interviewee, Dr H A Hellyer reminded the anchor of the facts:

'Actually, this is something that the International Court of Justice addressed in its opinion last year and this is the highest authority of international law – that the withdrawal of troops from Gaza did not mean the end of the occupation of Gaza for them. On the contrary, Israel continues to be recognised by the ICJ as the occupying power in Gaza because it maintains effective control'. Thereafter the interviewer thanked Dr Hellyer and ended the interview.[208]

Gaza is effectively under occupation and the BBC, as the state broadcaster to which millions across the globe turn to for factual coverage, should acknowledge this reality. On 4 July 2024, the BBC rejected a complaint against a Panorama programme which objected to the programme's assertion that Gaza was under occupation: 'despite Israel's formal withdrawal from Gaza in 2005, many international bodies considered it continued to exert effective control over the enclave.'[209]

Settlements and international law

The analysis shows that settlements were covered in just one online article and eight broadcast clips in a way that provided context for 7 October.

International law was covered in only one online article and 0 broadcast clips in a way that provided context for 7 October.

The illegal and persistent building of settlements and settler violence has been a feature of Israel's occupation. UN Security Council Resolution 2334 reaffirmed Israel's role as an 'occupying power' and condemned 'all measures aimed at altering the demographic composition, character and status of the Palestinian Territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, including, inter alia, the construction and expansion of settlements, transfer of Israeli settlers, confiscation of land, demolition of homes and displacement of Palestinian civilians'.[210]

Indeed, an Israeli lawyer issued a legal opinion for the Israel foreign ministry in 1967 stating that 'civilian settlements in the occupied West Bank and other conquered territories violates the Fourth Geneva Convention related to the protection of victims of war and, specifically, its prohibition on settlements'.[211]

The impact of settlements has been severe: human rights groups have warned of mass ethnic cleansing in the West Bank. This was powerfully observed by Louis Theroux in a BBC documentary aired on 28 April 2025,[212] which shows how the Israeli state supports and encourages the creation of unabashedly illegal settlements across the West Bank, with deadly consequence.

One example where the occupation and settlements are referenced is in a report that cites Palestinian Ambassador to the UK, Husam Zomlot. The BBC's Middle Online Editor, Raffi Berg, acknowledges the occupation began in 1967 and discusses settler activity, while also finding space – as he did in the example above – to assert Israel's narrative: 'the settlements are considered illegal by most of the international community, though Israel disputes this.'[213]

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208 BBC News, Saturday 8 February 2025, 12:24

209 Panorama: Hamas's Secret Financial Empire, BBC One, 19 February 2024, BBC Executive Complaints Unit, 4 July 2024 https://www.bbc.co.uk/contact/ecu/panorama-hamass-secret-financial-empire-bbc-one-19-february-2024

210 United Nations Security Council Resolution 2334 (2016) https://www.un.org/webcast/pdfs/SRES2334-2016.pdf

211 Theodore Meron, The West Bank and International Humanitarian Law on the Eve of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Six-Day War. American Journal of International Law. 2017;111(2):357-375. doi:10.1017/ajil.2017.10

212 The Settlers, BBC 2 and iPlayer, https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m002bm1y

213 Palestinian envoy Husam Zomlot says UK guilty of hypocrisy, 16 January 2024, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-67999094

A similar disclaimer is seen from Berg in his write up about the International Court of Justice ruling that Israel's occupation of the territories occupied in 1967 was illegal. Whilst all sides of the debate were accounted for, this contrasting line stands out: 'The court said the settlements were illegal. Israel has consistently disputed that they are against international law.'[214]

Section Five of this report looks at how contextual factors are crucial when Israel is faced with accusations of genocide and war crimes. There the BBC's coverage of Israel's actions in the West Bank city of Jenin in August 2024 will be assessed. The BBC's reporting omitted the UN-documented settler violence where 'groups of settlers backed by [the Israeli Security Forces] have been terrorising multiple herding communities' and failed to contextualise the operation within what the UN describes as ongoing 'state violence along with settlement expansion... that continues to lead to mass displacement.'[215] While reporting infrastructure destruction, the BBC avoided terms like 'siege' or 'collective punishment' that appear in UN documentation, instead using more neutral phrasing like 'sealed-off' to describe Jenin camp.[216]

There are some rare, good examples, courtesy of the BBC's more seasoned reporters. For instance, on 9 December 2023, International Editor Jeremy Bowen wrote: 'For more than a century, Jews and Arabs have been confronting each other', 'Around 700,000 Israeli Jews now live in the occupied West Bank'. He acknowledged as he did in an earlier article what Palestinians call the 'al-Nakba', 'the catastrophe', and gave comprehensive historical context.[217]

This is important because any discussion of the 7 October attack must address the framework for evaluating the legality of Israel's actions. Israel has been in violation of scores of UN resolutions and international conventions for decades. On 19 July 2024,[218] the International Court of Justice issued a landmark advisory opinion declaring that Israel's occupation of the Gaza strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, is unlawful, along with the associated settlement regime, annexation and use of natural resources. The court added that Israel's legislation and measures violate the international prohibition on racial segregation and apartheid. The ICJ mandated Israel to end its occupation, dismantle its settlements, provide full reparations to Palestinian victims and facilitate the return of displaced people.[219]

Whilst there have been many reports giving account of proceedings at the International Court of Justice and International Criminal Court, it is quite extraordinary that the BBC has not discussed the centrality (or the moral imperative for) international law in this conflict. This absence is particularly crucial when examining the BBC's treatment of genocide claims, which will be examined in detail later in the report. Moreover, throughout this report we see the BBC's reporting routinely giving credence to what 'Israel says' and responds but not balancing this with what international law says to numerous actions taken by the Israelis.

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214 UN top court says Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories is illegal UN top court says Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories is illegal, 19 July 2024, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cjerjzxlpvdo

215 OHCHR: Israeli security forces have killed 36 Palestinians, including eight children, in 10 days during an operation in northern West Bank, while settler violence intensifies, UN OCHR, 6 September 2024, https://www.un.org/unispal/document/ohchr-press-release-west-bank-attacks-06sep24/

216 Inside the sealed-off Jenin refugee camp targeted by IDF, BBC News, 29 August 2024, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c8ergpxnd8xo

217 Israel-Gaza: The status quo is smashed. The future is messy and dangerous, 9 December 2023, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-67652494

218 https://www.icj-cij.org/node/204176

219 Summary of the Advisory Opinion of 19 July 2024 in the Legal Consequences arising from the Policies and Practices of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, ICJ Summary, 2024/8, International Court of Justice,19 July 2024 https://www.icj-cij.org/node/204176

Pre-October casualties

Our analysis found that pre-October casualties were covered in only one online article and zero broadcast clips in a way that provided context for 7 October.

At least 6,400 Palestinians were killed by Israeli forces in the occupied Palestinian territories from 2008 up to 7 October 2023, according to United Nations data,[220] with hundreds more killed in 2023 alone before the war began. The true total is likely higher when including earlier years and unrecorded incidents.[221]

This point is important because any news coverage that references 7 October should also be referencing how Israel has been responsible for attacking and killing Palestinians long before 7 October. A United Nations General Assembly resolution adopted just months before 7 October expressed 'grave concern about the disastrous humanitarian situation and the critical socioeconomic and security situation in the Gaza Strip', attributing this to 'military operations causing death and injury to Palestinian civilians, including children, women and non-violent, peaceful demonstrators'.[222]

Withholding contemporary context where it matters

Beyond the dataset, other areas of crucial contemporary context that should be covered by the BBC will be examined. The BBC's obligation to provide impartial coverage is also tested when dealing with fundamentally contested narratives in the Israel-Palestine conflict. These competing historical accounts and interpretations of current events sit at the heart of the conflict itself. How a broadcaster navigates these contested narratives – which ones it amplifies, which it questions, and which it omits – profoundly shapes public understanding.

Commitments to the two-state solution

We explored a crucial contextual area focused on the commitment to peace and a two-state solution from either Israeli or Palestinian leaders (Hamas and Palestinian Authority). The explainer article mentioned above does recognise that 'Israel rejects a two-state solution. It says any final settlement must be the result of negotiations with the Palestinians, and statehood should not be a precondition.' It also acknowledges that 'The Palestinian Authority backs a two-state solution but Hamas does not because it is opposed to the existence of Israel. Hamas says that it could accept an interim Palestinian state based on 1967 de facto borders, without officially recognising Israel, if refugees were given the right to return.'[223]

However, this description of how the two sides view the two-state solution is not always reflected. In particular, very few commentaries cite how the Israeli Prime Minister's Likud party is foundationally opposed to Palestinian sovereignty by stating 'between the Sea and the Jordan there will only be Israeli sovereignty.'[224]

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220 UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, https://www.ochaopt.org/data/casualties

221 For Palestinians in the West Bank, 2023 was the deadliest year on record, ReliefWeb/Medicins Sans Frontier, 15 December 2023, https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/palestinians-west-bank-2023-was-deadliest-year-record

222 Israeli practices affecting the human rights of the Palestinian people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, Report of the Secretary-General, A/78/502, 2 October 2023, https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/reports/a78502-israeli-practices-affecting-human-rights-palestinian-people-occupied

223 Op. Cit., Israel and the Palestinians: History of the conflict explained, BBC News, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/newsbeat-44124396

224 Likud Party: Original Party Platform, 1977 https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/original-party-platform-of-the-likud-party

In its explainer on Hamas, a BBC article notes that in 2017, 'Hamas produced a new policy document, that softened some of its stated positions and used more measured language. There was no recognition of Israel, but it did formally accept the creation of an interim Palestinian state in Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem – what are known as pre-1967 lines.'[225]

But in a Panorama programme already mentioned above, the programme's introduction states unequivocally that 'Hamas rejects Israel's right to exist and is committed to its destruction', presenting this as an established fact requiring no additional context. This is repeated in the accompanying article, though it does examine Netanyahu's obstructionist role and implicitly suggests his government's rejection of Palestinian statehood: this treatment differs markedly from the direct language used to characterise Hamas's position.[226] This subtle difference in framing persists despite the wealth of documented evidence – from official statements to policy actions, and, indeed, by the BBC itself – demonstrating the Israeli government's explicit opposition to Palestinian sovereignty.

In other broadcasts, we see examples where former US Middle East Negotiator Dennis Ross says emphatically in an interview with the BBC World Service on 8 October 2023 that: 'The problem I think that exists with Hamas is that Hamas rejects Israel's right to exist. They view all of Israel as being part of an Islamic trust.' He is not challenged at all on this point.[227]

In a package examining the two-state solution in December 2023, the reporter does recognise that both parties have questionable commitment to the two-state solution, but the language disparity is striking. He rightly states: 'The leader of Israel's government, Benjamin Netanyahu, is against Palestinian independence, and he is opposed to the two-state solution.' The reporter cuts to a speech the Israeli leader is delivering at the UN and the reporter says: 'In the same speech, he accused Palestinians of not recognising the Jewish state of Israel', cutting to Netanyahu who says: 'For peace to prevail, the Palestinians must stop spewing Jew hatred, finally reconciled themselves to the Jewish state.' Then, presenting the Palestinian side, the reporter says: 'Hamas, seen by some Palestinians as a resistance movement, and designated a terrorist group by Western leaders, rejects Israel's right to exist. Hamas has what they describe as an armed struggle.'[228]

In a BBC interview in 2021, the Tzipi Hotovely, the Israeli Ambassador to the UK was asked: 'Are you in favour of the two-state solution?'. She refused to answer, simply by saying: 'I am in favour of peace' and talked about 'pragmatic solutions' and criticising Palestinian intentions.[229]

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225 Hamas: The Palestinian militant group that rules Gaza, BBC News, 1 July 2021 https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-13331522

226 Israeli PM 'missed chance' to cut off Hamas cash, says ex-spy chief, 19 February 2024 https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-68318856

227 Weekend, BBC World Service, 8 October 2023, 06:43

228 BBC News, 9 December 2023, 09:32 GMT

229 BBC Newsnight on X, 20 April 2021, https://x.com/BBCNewsnight/status/1384642061492686849

One example of a perspective that has context comes from Frank Gardner, Security Correspondent for the BBC. Commenting on another speech by Benjamin Netanyahu at the UN General Assembly, Frank Gardner said:

> **"I think it's important to remind our viewers that Israel wants peace and has been unfairly attacked in many cases. It is under constant threat, but Benjamin Netanyahu is seen by many, including the US State Department, as an obstacle to resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict — specifically, the creation of a Palestinian state. Every day, Palestinians in the West Bank—what Netanyahu refers to as Judea and Samaria—are being tormented, their olive groves burned down, their cars set on fire, as settlers illegally try to push them out of their land. Regarding Hezbollah, he is absolutely right—they attacked Israel on October 8, the day after the Hamas raid. That attack launched an 11-month period of low-level warfare, which has since escalated significantly. He is also correct that UN Resolution 1701 was meant to push Hezbollah north of the Lani River to prevent them from shelling northern Israel. However, Hezbollah has not abided by this, and the UN has been spineless in enforcing it. The fact remains: if a ceasefire is reached in Gaza and the Palestinians are granted a homeland, many of these problems will be resolved." '[230]**

230 Frank Gardner, BBC News, 27 September 2024, 15:20 BST

Israeli military doctrines and procedures

The BBC's coverage has notably omitted reference to controversial Israeli military doctrines that provide crucial context for understanding operations in Gaza and Lebanon most notably the Hannibal Directive and the Dahiya Doctrine.

The Hannibal Directive authorises overwhelming force to prevent Israeli soldiers from being captured alive, even at risk to the soldiers themselves. In the words of the Jerusalem Post, the directive is divisive because 'it deliberately puts potential hostages at risk of being killed by IDF fire.'[231] A major investigation by the Israeli newspaper Haaretz revealed how the procedure was seemingly activated during the 7 October attacks 'from the first hours following the attack and at various points along the border.' The paper stated that

> **'cumulative data indicates that many of the kidnapped people were at risk, exposed to Israeli gunfire, even if they were not the target.'[232]**

The United Nations in an interim report identified cases where Israelis were likely to have been killed as a result of the directive.[233] On 5 December 2024, the BBC's Executive Complaints Unit rejected a complaint of a broadcast that 'did not reflect the fact that "a significant number" of the Israelis who died had been killed by Israeli fire.' Justifying its decision, the Unit cited the 'The UN report on the attack was able to establish that 14 people died as a result of Israeli fire – a figure corroborated by other reporting.'[234] This is the same report cited above. The UN report stated: 'In several locations, the IDF applied the so-called "Hannibal Directive" and killed at least 14 Israeli civilians.'[235]

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231 'All means are kosher': A look at the IDF's controversial Hannibal Directive - explainer, 27 February 2024, Jerusalem Post, https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/article-844045

232 IDF Ordered Hannibal Directive on October 7 to Prevent Hamas Taking Soldiers Captive, Haaretz, 7 July 2024, https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2024-07-07/ty-article-magazine/.premium/idf-ordered-hannibal-directive-on-october-7-to-prevent-hamas-taking-soldiers-captive/00000190-89a2-d776-a3b1-fdbe45520000

233 Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel, United Nations Human Rights Council, 13 June 2024, p. 8 https://www.un.org/unispal/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/a-hrc-56-26-auv.pdf

234 BBC News (1pm), BBC One, 7 October 2024, BBC Executive Complaints Unit, 5 December 2024, https://www.bbc.co.uk/contact/ecu/bbc-news-1pm-bbc-one-7-october-2024

235 Op. Cit., Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel, p. 18

The use of this controversial directive that led to Israelis being killed that fateful day was important enough for Israeli newspapers, and several other news outlets including the staunchly pro-Israel Daily Telegraph.[236] Yet, despite its profound relevance, the BBC referenced this policy only once, in 2015, noting that Amnesty International said its implementation 'led to the ordering of unlawful attacks on civilians'.[237]

Given the importance of this directive to the United Nations and its reference by other outlets, it is reasonable to ask the BBC why this policy has been omitted from the corporation's reporting.

The Dahiya Doctrine provides essential context for Israel's strategy in Palestine, particularly the widespread destruction of civilian infrastructure, including hospitals, universities, and residential areas – all constituting war crimes. The Israeli newspaper Haaretz confirmed the doctrine's activation as early as 8 October 2023.[238] According to the Israeli +972 Magazine, the Dahiya Doctrine was potentially implemented through an AI system called 'Habsora' (The Gospel) that enabled 'a mass assassination factory' targeting Palestinian homes, generating hundreds of targets daily with reduced concern for civilian casualties and creating widespread devastation in Gaza as part of a deliberate strategy to exert pressure on Hamas through civilian suffering.[239]

Based on a search on Google.com, the Dahiya Doctrine appeared only once[240] in BBC online coverage from 2010, quoting then-General Eizenkot – who coined the phrase: 'We will wield disproportionate power and cause immense damage and destruction. This isn't a suggestion. It's a plan that has already been authorised.'[241] The doctrine was also mentioned only once, in passing by an analyst on a BBC World Service programme, The Real Story, in November 2023.[242] As outlined in Section 5, the omission of the Dahiya Doctrine in the face of mounting genocide allegations against Israel is a major contextual flaw on behalf of the organisation.

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236 Israel killed own citizens on October 7 in 'Hannibal Directive', UN claims, 13 June 2024, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/world-news/2024/06/13/israel-killed-dozen-own-citizens-on-october-7-un-claims/

237 Gaza: 'Israeli war crimes' followed soldier's capture - Amnesty, BBC News, 29 October 2015, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-33700343

238 Israel-Gaza War: A Catastrophic Failure That Will Send Political Shockwaves, Haaretz, 8 October 2023 https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2023-10-08/ty-article/.premium/a-failure-of-all-systems-with-political-shock-waves-like-73/0000018b-0c06-dae3-a1cb-bd0f3be90000

239 'A mass assassination factory': Inside Israel's calculated bombing of Gaza, + 972 magazine, 30 November 2023, https://www.972mag.com/mass-assassination-factory-israel-calculated-bombing-gaza/

240 Searched for "Dahiya Doctrine" on Google.com site:bbc.co.uk on 5 May 2025

241 Ten years on, is Hezbollah prepared for another war with Israel?, 12 July 2016, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/36559373

242 The Real Story, BBC World Service, 25 November 2023, https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/w3ct4q7n

Holding the UK Government accountable over Israel

The BBC's reporting on the UK's military relationship with Israel reflects another area where journalistic obligations do not seem to be fully met. This section examines whether the BBC held the UK government accountable on matters relating to surveillance support and arms sales to Israel.

While the BBC acknowledged in October 2024 that the UK would 'consider providing intelligence gathered from surveillance flights over Gaza to the International Criminal Court if requested', it gave space without scrutinising Ministry of Defence denials that the UK was 'providing wider targeting information to Israel or that RAF aircraft have been used to fly weapons into Israel during its war in Gaza.[243] The BBC consistently framed these flights within the government's official narrative that they were unarmed' and 'tasked solely to locate hostages',[244] without examining the broader implications or challenging these assertions.

This uncritical stance stands in contrast to investigations by other organisations and outlets. The International Centre for Justice for Palestinians reported that given the 'UK has conducted at least 645 surveillance missions over Gaza since October 2023, accounting for 47% of the total number of surveillance flights',[245] there were questions to be answered about the scale and purpose of these operations. Declassified UK revealed that RAF surveillance planes had captured footage on the day Israeli forces killed British aid workers in 2024, but that the Ministry of Defence refused to release this footage citing security exemptions.[246] Middle East Eye reported that family members of the killed British aid worker James Kirby criticised the government for withholding this potential evidence, quoting his mother asking: 'I want to know who's made that decision not to make it public and why they haven't'.[247] The fact that the BBC does not adequately investigate these connections represents a significant contextual gap in its coverage.

The BBC's reporting also rarely examined the UK's broader military relationship with Israel, including arms sales, training programmes, and diplomatic support. While occasionally reporting policy changes such as the Labour government 'restricting UK arms sales to Israel' in the article cited above,[248] the broadcaster did not provide comprehensive analysis of the UK's long standing military cooperation with Israel nor did it scrutinise the government's claims about its limited role in the conflict. This pattern of contextual omission is particularly concerning given the BBC's obligations as a public service broadcaster to provide audiences with the information needed to understand complex geopolitical relationships and their implications for British foreign policy.

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243 UK willing to hand over Gaza intelligence to war crimes court, BBC News, 25 October 2024, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c2k0d1elj81o

244 Israel-Gaza: UK launches surveillance flights to find Hamas hostages, BBC News, 2 December 2023, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-67604423

245 International Centre for Justice for Palestinians, 'The Role of the British Military in Israel's Gaza Genocide', Briefing G111, November 2024, https://www.icjpalestine.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/G111-The-Role-of-the-British-Military-in-Israel.pdf

246 UK covers up Gaza spy footage from day of aid worker massacre", Declassified UK, 22 July 2024, https://www.declassifieduk.org/uk-covers-up-gaza-spy-footage-from-day-of-aid-worker-massacre/

247 UK won't release spy plane footage related to killing of UK aid worker in Gaza", Middle East Eye, 1 April 2025, https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/uk-wont-release-spy-plane-footage-related-killing-uk-aid-worker-gaza

248 Op. Cit. UK willing to hand over Gaza intelligence to war crimes court, BBC News, 25 October 2024

Recommendations

Provide consistent historical context: When reporting on events following 7 October, include information about the decades-long occupation, blockade, and pre-October violence against Palestinians. Don't shut down interviewees who attempt to do so.

Identify occupation clearly: Routinely let readers and viewers know that Gaza has been and remains under effective Israeli occupation despite the 2005 withdrawal, as confirmed by international law experts.

Ditch 'both-siderism' – there is the Occupier and the Occupied: The BBC should drop its current two sides narrative which equalises Israel and Palestinians. Reporting should clearly state that this is an ongoing conflict between an occupier (Israel) and those who are occupied (Palestinians).

Give context to longstanding Israeli operations: Cover Israeli military policies like the Dahiya Doctrine and Hannibal Directive that are essential for understanding the strategic context of operations in Gaza.

Hold our UK government accountable: Investigate and report on British military, intelligence and diplomatic support for Israel's operations, applying the same standards used for other conflicts.

Report the reality of Israeli Apartheid: Present the assessments of major human rights organisations regarding Israel's apartheid policies, treating these claims with the same seriousness as other human rights violations.

Explain Palestinian rights under international law: Clarify that Palestinians have internationally recognised rights to self-determination and to resist occupation, especially given the disproportionate mentions of Israel's right to defend itself.

Flag well-documented Israeli opposition to a Palestinian state: The past positions and utterances of Israeli leaders in reference to Palestinians and their aspirations should be made clear to audiences. For example, Netanyahu has categorically stated his opposition to the establishment of a Palestinian State.

5. GENOCIDE AND WAR CRIMES

Key Findings

- **Ignoring genocidal intent:** BBC articles made **zero mention** of Israel's genocidal rhetoric, such as Netanyahu's biblical Amalek reference or President Herzog's claim of Palestinian collective responsibility. The BBC barely acknowledged (**12 total mentions**) former defence minister Gallant's statement in which he referred to Palestinians as **'human animals'** and ordered **'a complete siege on the Gaza strip'**, stating that: **'We will eliminate everything'**.
- **Suppressing genocide claims: BBC presenters actively shut down interviewees' genocide claims – in over 100 documented instances** – despite human rights organisations such as Amnesty International concluding that a genocide is taking place, and legal bodies, such as the ICJ, which not only refused to dismiss South Africa's case that Israel was committing genocide in Gaza but also issued provisional measures to protect Palestinians against the irreparable damage to their rights to be protected from genocide.
- **Downplaying war crimes:** The term **'war crimes'** in relation to Israeli violence against Palestinians was mentioned in only **121 BBC articles (3%).**

This war has been described as **'the first genocide broadcast live'**[249] – meticulously documented by human rights organisations, journalists, and witnesses on the ground. The evidence of a genocide being carried out in Gaza has mounted steadily. The Israeli Holocaust historian Raz Segal described the unfolding events as early as October 2023 as 'a textbook case of genocide'.[250] Renowned Oxford historian Avi Shlaim, and many other leading academics, have also used the word genocide.[251] In January 2024, the International Court of Justice found South Africa's genocide allegations against Israel met the 'plausibility' threshold for interim measures.[252]

249 Gaza War '1st genocide broadcast live,' says former UNRWA official, Anadolu Agency, 16 February 2024 https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/gaza-war-1st-genocide-broadcast-live-says-former-unrwa-official/3139393

250 A Textbook Case of Genocide, Jewish Currents, 13 October 2023, https://jewishcurrents.org/a-textbook-case-of-genocide

251 'We're Witnessing the Last Gasp of Israeli Violence': In Conversation With Avi Shlaim, 21 March, 2025, https://novaramedia.com/2025/03/21/were-witnessing-the-last-gasp-of-israeli-violence-in-conversation-with-avi-shlaim/

252 Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa v. Israel), Order on Request for the Indication of Provisional Measures, International Court of Justice, January 26, 2024. https://www.icj-cij.org/node/203447.

In September 2024, a Special Committee of the United Nations investigating Israeli practices concluded that 'policies and practices of Israel during the reporting period are consistent with the characteristics of genocide.'[253] In issuing an arrest warrant against both Israel and Palestinian leaders, International Criminal Court Chief Prosecutor Karim Khan KC said: 'Israel has intentionally and systematically deprived the civilian population in all parts of Gaza of objects indispensable to human survival'.[254]

By December 2024, after more than a year of war, Amnesty International said that 'Israel, through its policies, actions and omissions against Palestinians in Gaza following 7 October 2023, committed and is committing genocide',[255] while Human Rights Watch concluded that Israel had intentionally inflicted 'conditions of life calculated to bring about physical destruction' on Gaza's Palestinian population — an 'act of genocide' under the 1948 Genocide Convention.[256]

How, then, did the BBC – with its mandate for impartiality and responsibility to inform the British public – reflect these observations from credible institutions and experts? More importantly, to what extent did the BBC report on the hundreds of daily attacks conducted by the Israeli state against the Palestinians, all of which are now being flagged as genocidal acts?

This section examines how the corporation handled serious allegations of genocide and violations of international law, questioning whether the BBC fairly represented and scrutinised evidence for these contentious claims. We examine a range of factors: from burying incriminating statements by Israeli officials to the dismissive treatment of genocide mentions by presenters.

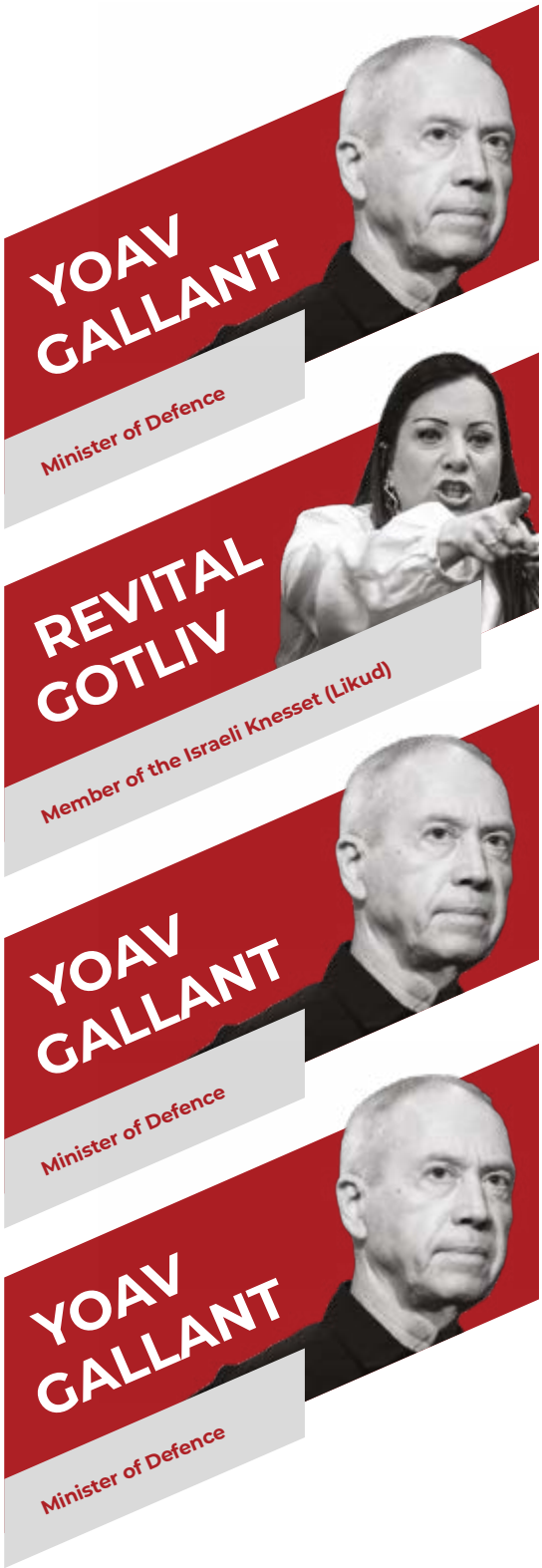
253 Report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, 20 September 2024, p.25 https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n24/271/19/pdf/n2427119.pdf

254 Statement of ICC Prosecutor Karim A.A. Khan KC: Applications for arrest warrants in the situation in the State of Palestine, International Criminal Court, https://www.icc-cpi.int/news/statement-icc-prosecutor-karim-aa-khan-kc-applications-arrest-warrants-situation-state

255 'You Feel Like You Are Subhuman': Israel's Genocide Against Palestinians in Gaza, Amnesty International, December 2024

256 Extermination and Acts of Genocide, Israel Deliberately Depriving Palestinians in Gaza of Water, Human Rights Watch, 19 December 2024, p. 29 https://www.hrw.org/report/2024/12/19/extermination-and-acts-genocide/israel-deliberately-depriving-palestinians-gaza

Did the BBC cover Israeli genocidal statements?[257]



09/10/2023

Covered in BBC articles: 10

> "**I have ordered a complete siege on the Gaza Strip**. **There will be no electricity, no food, no fuel**, everything is closed. **We are fighting human animals** and we are acting accordingly"

07/10/2023

Covered in BBC articles: 0

> "Bring down buildings!! **Bomb without distinction**!! Stop with this impotence. You have ability. There is worldwide legitimacy! **Flatten Gaza**. Without mercy! **This time, there is no room for mercy!"**

09/10/2023

Covered in BBC articles: 0

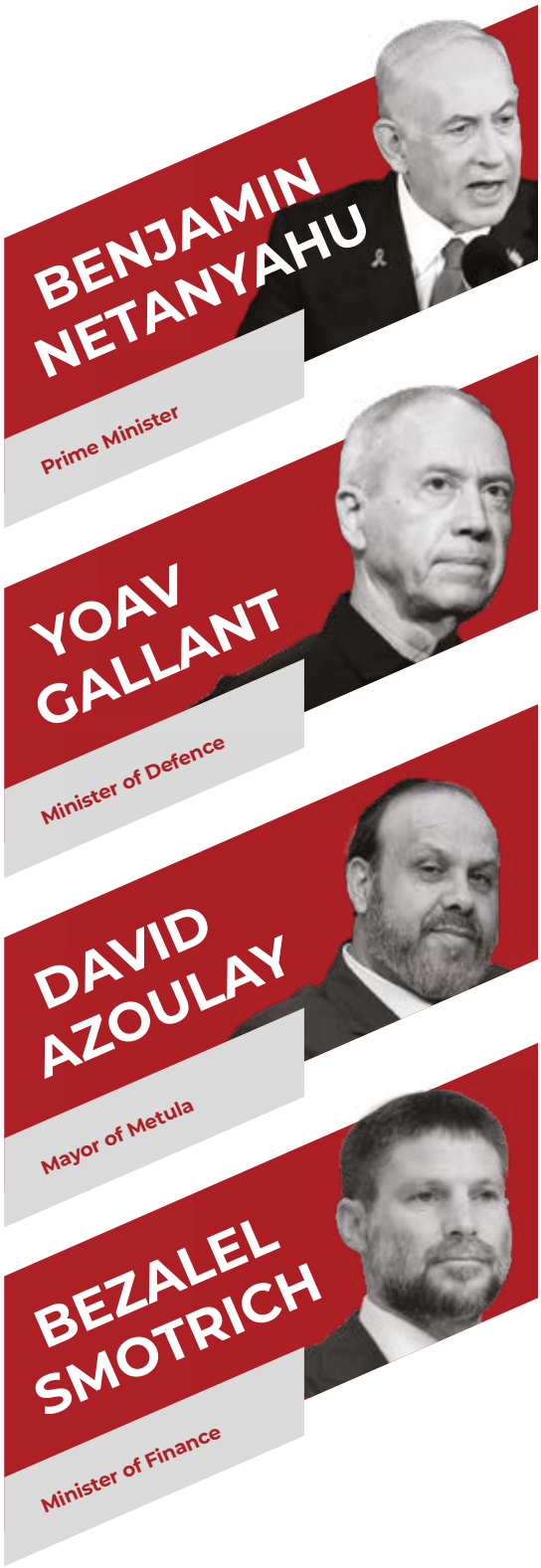
> "**We will end things inside Gaza**. **I have removed all restraints,** [you are allowed to] attack everything, kill those who fight us, whether there is one terrorist or there are hundreds of terrorists, [ordering to attack] through the air, land, with tanks, with bulldozers, by all means, there are no compromises. **Gaza will not return to what it was**."

10/10/2023

Covered in BBC articles: 1

> "**We will eliminate everything.** If it doesn't take one day, it will take a week, it will take weeks, or even months, we will reach all places. There is no way that our brothers, our children, our parents will be killed and we won't react because we are a state, they will regret it"

257 We did this through variations of unique keywords or phrases were searched for rather than exact quote matches. See Core Methodology



13/10/2023

Covered in BBC articles: 0

"Gaza is the city of evil, we will turn all the places in which Hamas deploys and hides into ruins. **I am telling the people of Gaza: get out of there now**. We will act everywhere and with full power'

11/11/2023

Covered in BBC articles: 1

"I am saying here to the citizens of Lebanon, I already see the citizens in Gaza walking with white flags along the coast. If Hezbollah makes mistakes of this kind, the ones who will pay the price are first of all the citizens of Lebanon. **What we are doing in Gaza, we know how to do in Beirut**.'

17/12/2023

Covered in BBC articles: 0

'**The whole Gaza Strip needs to be empty**. Flattened. **Just like in Auschwitz**. Let it be a museum for all the world to see what Israel can do. **Let no one reside in the Gaza Strip for all the world to see, because October 7 was in a way a second Holocaust.'**

29/04/2024

Covered in BBC articles: 0

'Moments before redemption, we must not hesitate. **We must destroy Rafah, Nusseirat, & Dir al-Balah 'wipe out the memory of Amalek!** There's no half- measure. Rafah, Dir al-Balah Nusseirat absolute destruction!'

Did the BBC track genocidal intent?

According to Amnesty International, 'genocidal intent has been part and parcel of Israel's conduct' since operations began in October 2023. These statements 'may amount to direct and public incitement to commit genocide, a specific crime under the Genocide Convention, because such statements, assessed within the applicable linguistic and cultural context, sought to directly prompt or provoke the intended audience to commit genocide.'[258] As an important international 'recorder' of the first draft of history, this section examines the extent to which the BBC fulfilled its obligations reporting these statements.

The significance of reporting such statements was underscored by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in its January 2024 ruling on South Africa's case against Israel. The Court specifically highlighted statements by senior Israeli officials as potentially evidencing genocidal intent, finding them sufficiently concerning to order Israel to 'take all measures within its power to prevent and punish the direct and public incitement to commit genocide in relation to members of the Palestinian group in Gaza Strip.'[259]

The Court determined that these statements, combined with the catastrophic humanitarian situation in Gaza, constituted a plausible risk of irreparable harm to Palestinians as a protected group under the Genocide Convention — sufficient grounds for imposing binding provisional measures on Israel while the full case proceeds.

In December 2024, the Israeli legal expert Omer Shatz and others submitted a report to the International Criminal Court (ICC) in which they argued that senior Israeli officials had engaged in direct and public incitement to commit genocide against Palestinians in Gaza. The report stresses that incitement to genocide is a standalone international crime under Article 25(3)(e) of the Rome Statute — an inchoate offence that must be prosecuted independently of whether genocide has occurred. The submission warns that ignoring incitement risks enabling further atrocities, stating: 'A failure to comply with the obligation to prosecute incitement to genocide exposes millions of Gazans to other genocidal acts as well as to ICC crimes'.[260] Several news outlets such as the Israeli newspaper Haaretz covered this submission.[261] The BBC was not one of them.

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258 'You Feel Like You Are Subhuman': Israel's Genocide Against Palestinians in Gaza, Amnesty International, December 2024

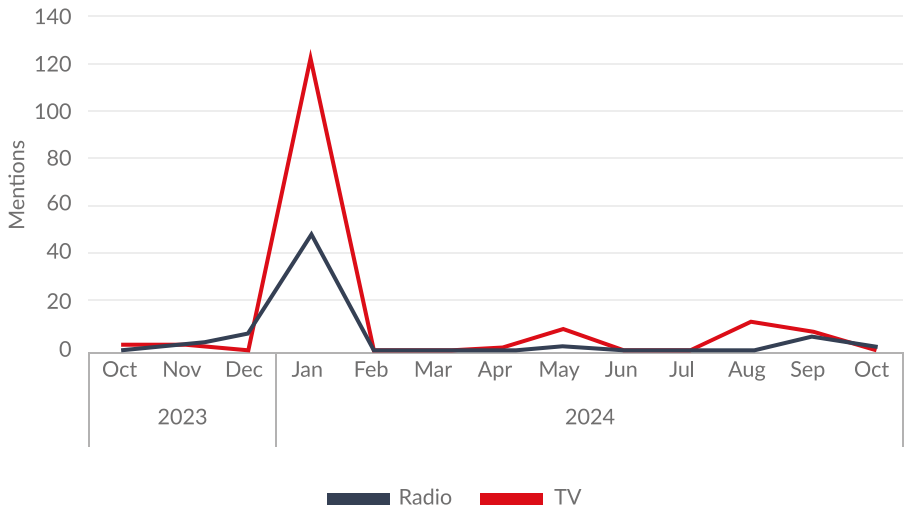
259 Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa v. Israel), Order of 26 January 2024, International Court of Justice. Reports 2024, para. 79, https://www.icj-cij.org/node/203447

260 Omer Shatz et al., Communication to the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court: Incitement to Genocide in Gaza, December 6, 2024, Statewatch, https://www.statewatch.org/media/4664/icc-submission-israel-palestine-incitement-to-genocide-6-12-24.pdf

261 The Israeli Lawyer Filing a Landmark Incitement to Genocide Case Against Israel at the ICC, Haaretz, January 2025 https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2025-01-24/ty-article-magazine/.premium/the-israeli-lawyer-filing-a-landmark-genocide-case-against-israel-at-the-icc/00000194-59bf-d76e-a7dd-7bff42610000

Graph 11

Mentions of 'Genocidal intent' in BBC boradcast coverage



Graph: Mentions of 'Genocidal intent' PLUS 'Gaza' on BBC broadcasts. SOURCE: Critical Mention

How did the BBC treat the issue of genocidal intent? In our data of articles and broadcasts between 7 October 2023 to 7 October 2024, the phrase 'genocidal intent' was tracked in seven articles[262] and 147 BBC broadcasts clips (TV and radio). Genocidal intent was first mentioned online on 11 January 2024,[263] and all of them (bar one[264]) was in relation to South Africa highlighting this issue at the ICJ. Broadcast references to the term peaked at 65 mentions in January 2024.[265]

It was first cited by an interviewee on the BBC News channel on 30 October 2023, raising the alarm by warning that Israeli leaders 'have told us that they are imposing a complete siege, denial of electricity, fuel, water, food. They have admitted they are engaging in collective punishment. They have expressed genocidal intent. Where there are no Palestinian civilians, according to them.'[266] That significance is only referenced a handful of times until the January 2024 spike.

262 Identified through a keyword search of our dataset.

263 Israel officials support Gaza destruction, court hears, BBC News, 11 January 2024, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-67942983

264 Foreign Office official resigns over Israel arms sales, 18 August 2024, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cyvpm1049d9o

265 Keyword search of the Critical Mention media monitoring platform. Searching "Genocidal Intent" + "Israel" searched on Critical Mention between 7 October 2023 to 7 October 2024 across BBC News, BBC 1 and 2, BBC Radio 4, BBC 5 Live and BBC World Service

266 BBC News channel, 30 October 2023 19:39

The reporting of genocidal intent is a key litmus test for our public broadcaster seeking to achieve high journalistic standards. This was a concern also for BBC newsroom staff: in a joint letter, newsroom staff urged the BBC to ensure that interviews with Israeli officials should include robust questioning, including on 'any comments made by their governments that could potentially amount to aiding and abetting genocide under Article III'.[267] To fail to communicate it with due significance and in a timely way appears at best a dereliction of duty, and at worst an intent to bury genocidal intent.

In a lengthy essay on dehumanising language published by BBC Future in late October, 2023, the article discusses the 'charged rhetoric from both sides of the conflict unfolding in Israel and Gaza' and quotes an academic who says there is 'surprisingly little evidence that dehumanising language causes violent behaviour, but plenty of evidence says it accompanies it.' The piece makes no specific reference to the genocidal statements mentioned here.[268]

Reporting Israeli genocidal statements

The most potent articulation of genocidal intent is from former Israeli defence minister and war crimes suspect Yoav Gallant. In justifying Israel's cutting off of Gaza, Gallant said: **'We are fighting human animals. This is the ISIS of Gaza. This is what we are fighting against… Gaza won't return to what it was before.'** So consequential was this statement, it was cited as an example of genocidal intent by South Africa in its genocide case against Israel at the International Court of Justice.[269] As the case study below shows, the BBC failed to adequately warn audiences about the significance of this statement, and has underreported this statement since 7 October.

Gallant's **'human animals'** statement is only the tip of the iceberg. Human rights organisations have identified statements from several other Israeli leaders as evidence of potential genocidal intent as can be seen in the Table above. The BBC chose to ignore and not report on the majority of these – and numerous other statements of plausible genocidal intent.

Perhaps the most glaring omission from the BBC's online coverage is Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's charged statement on 28 October 2023: 'You must remember what Amalek has done to you, says our Holy Bible.' This biblical reference – widely understood as invoking divine command to utterly annihilate an enemy – was interpreted by many legal experts as potential evidence of genocidal intent at the highest level of Israeli leadership yet went unreported by the BBC despite its citation in South Africa's case at the International Court of Justice. A simple search on the BBC website (as of 1 May 2025) does not return any results either. This means that a reader of the BBC's entire website would never come across this statement, its meaning, its intent, nor the fact of its utterance as a newsworthy and significant event.

Meanwhile, across BBC broadcast, there were 10 references to 'Amalek' and its significance.[270] It is cited by interviewer Stephen Sackur who puts the point to an Israeli guest that: 'We've seen videos of Israeli soldiers using the word Amalek, which is, of course, a reference to a Biblical destruction of an entire people.'[271] Meanwhile, in an August 2024 broadcast, the BBC investigated the significance of the term.

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267 The Listening Post, Al Jazeera, 4 October 2024 https://youtu.be/UAmk4efA2t0?si=Opy6kYFEsO5r2gE4

268 The harm caused by dehumanising language, BBC Future, 31 October 2023 https://www.bbc.co.uk/future/article/20231030-the-real-life-harm-caused-by-dehumanising-language

269 Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa v. Israel), Order on Request for the Indication of Provisional Measures, International Court of Justice, January 26, 2024, paras. 60-74

270 According to a search through the Critical Mention reporting service

271 BBC HARDtalk, 20 December 2023, 23:45

While it stated that: 'Prime Minister Netanyahu's office says he was talking about Hamas in connection to Amalek and not Palestinian civilians,' it nevertheless examined the importance and reach of the statement on social media.[272]

Other alarming statements that were also not reported include Education Minister Yoav Kisch declaring Palestinians 'have no right to exist' and 'need to be exterminated' (9 October 2023), Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich's call to 'destroy Rafah, Nusseirat, and Dir al-Balah and 'wipe out the memory of Amalek!' (29 April 2024) or Heritage Minister Amihai Eliyahu stating that dropping a nuclear bomb on the Gaza Strip was 'one of the possibilities' of the conflict'.[273]

In August 2024, the BBC did finally cover the issue under the headline: 'Has Israel taken enough action to prevent alleged incitement to genocide?', even though the ICJ's ruling was made in January 2024. While there was no examination on the consequential statements by Gallant, this was a thorough report looking into 'several pronouncements made since the ICJ's order to see if they could break the ruling', whilst also looking at statements from Hamas officials as well.[274]

However, as fact-checking organisation Misbar noted, this BBC report displayed bias favouring Israel through its framing and selective sourcing.[275] Misbar highlighted the BBC quoting Anne Herzberg from NGO Monitor as especially problematic. The BBC claims NGO Monitor merely 'reports on international NGO activity from a pro-Israel perspective'. Yet, according to the Israeli Policy Working Group, NGO Monitor 'consistently shields and promotes government policies that seek to perpetuate, consolidate and expand Israel's occupation of, and control over, the Palestinian territories.'[276]

Case study: 'Human animals'

On 9 October 2023, former Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant declared: **'I have released all restraints…You saw what we are fighting against. We are fighting human animals. This is the ISIS of Gaza. This is what we are fighting against…Gaza won't return to what it was before. There will be no Hamas. We will eliminate everything. If it doesn't take one day, it will take a week, it will take weeks or even months, we will reach all places.'**

This statement, issued alongside the announcement of a complete siege on Gaza — cutting off electricity, food, water, and fuel, which are war crimes — has drawn widespread condemnation and analysis for its explicit dehumanisation of Palestinians. Article 33 of the Geneva Conventions legally prohibits collective punishment. The ICJ specifically cited this statement in its January 2024 order. The Court found such rhetoric sufficiently concerning to warrant ordering immediate provisional measures which Israel is legally obliged to adhere to.

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272 BBC News channel, 31 August 2024, 10:42

273 'Nakba 2023': Israel right-wing ministers' comments add fuel to Palestinian fears, NBC News, 13 November 2023 https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/gaza-nakba-israels-far-right-palestinian-fears-hamas-war-rcna123909

274 Has Israel taken enough action to prevent alleged incitement to genocide? BBC News, 27 August 2024, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cze5w2wd4x0o

275 Bias in BBC Report on Israel's Efforts To Prevent Genocide Incitement, 2 September 2024, https://www.misbar.com/en/editorial/2024/09/02/bias-in-bbc-report-on-israels-efforts-to-prevent-genocide-incitement

276 NGO Monitor: Shrinking Space – Defaming human rights organizations that criticise Israeli occupation, September 2018, p. 6, http://policyworkinggroup.org.il/report_en.pdf

Amnesty International details how this consequential statement was not only repeated by Israeli officials, but transformed itself from rhetorical device into concrete policy actions that defined Israel's approach throughout the year.[277] That theme persisted through to 2025 when, on 2 March, the Israeli government once again breached a ceasefire and re-imposed a total blockade on Gaza.

Whilst the BBC online coverage did first report Gallant's infamous declaration on 9 October 2023, the gravity of this comment seems to have been overlooked.[278] Instead of highlighting its significance as potential evidence of genocidal intent, the BBC buried this statement deep (paragraph 31) in an article primarily focused on Israel regaining control of border communities and military developments. The declaration appeared again in a report covering protests in the US. Whilst not adequately capturing the gravity of the comment, the BBC article did acknowledge: 'Israeli officials have used extreme language, with Defence Minister Yoav Gallant referring to what he later claimed was Hamas militants as "human animals".'[279]

The following February – some four months later – the comments were cited again in the context of the humanitarian crisis. Whilst accusations of genocide were referenced in this lengthy piece by Jeremy Bowen, the Corporation had to append a clarification at the end of the article later that year saying that it was 'wrong to suggest Israel faced "plausible allegations" that it was committing genocide'.[280]

BBC NEWS

Israel-Gaza war: Death and Israel's search for 'total victory'

THE ISRAEL GAZA BRIEFINGS

PRESS

Correction 26 September 2024: We were **wrong to suggest Israel faced "plausible allegations" that it was committing genocide'.** *Following publication of this article the president of the ICJ gave an interview in which she said the court did not make a ruling on whether the claim of genocide was plausible, as was reported at the time, but it did emphasise that there was a risk of irreparable harm to the Palestinian right to be protected from genocide. Our Legal Correspondent later explained this in an article which can be viewed* **here**.

The following month, the consequences of Gallant's statement was finally given some acknowledgement, but still only implicitly and via another personal report from Jeremy Bowen entitled: 'Israel denies famine looms in Gaza, but evidence is overwhelming'. The sensitively written piece attempts to relay testimony from both sides of the divide and states that 'the idea that Israel is committing genocide alongside a whole range of other crimes of war in Gaza is universally accepted among them.'[281]

277 Amnesty International, Op.cit., pp. 244-251

278 Israel's military says it fully controls communities on Gaza border, BBC News, 9 October 2023 https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-67050127

279 Israel and Gaza on campus: Tumult at US colleges as two sides dig in, BBC News, 16 October 2023, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-67114291

280 Israel-Gaza war: Death and Israel's search for 'total victory, BBC News, 11 February 2024 https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-68255843

281 Jeremy Bowen: Israel denies famine looms in Gaza, but evidence is overwhelming, 11 April 2024, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-68788140

Thereafter, Gallant's 'human animals' statement was reported only seven times by the BBC in the entire year following its utterance, and only once in relation to war crimes proceedings against Gallant in May 2024.[282] Notably, the comment was entirely absent from online BBC reports covering proceedings against Israel at the ICJ, despite its relevance to allegations of genocidal intent. In total, this consequential comment by Yoav Gallant's, perceived globally as a genocidal statement of intent, was cited just ten times in BBC articles.

By January 2024, Gallant's comments were referenced in South Africa's case against Israel at the International Court of Justice, inevitably requiring reporting by the BBC. Unlike the BBC's online coverage, outlets such as the Associated Press did examine the significance of this and other incendiary statements by Israeli leaders during court proceedings.[283]

In BBC broadcast segments, the phrase appeared approximately 80 times.[284] In most of these occasions, they are referenced by interviewees rather than reporters or interviewers themselves. The statement was first reported on BBC News broadcast platforms on 9 October.[285] In an interview with Middle East analyst Mustafa Tahani, the interviewer challenged him by stating that Israel 'would reject' Mustafa's assertion about Israel killing Palestinians indiscriminately. Mustafa specifically referenced Gallant's 'human animals' comment as evidence of Israeli intent, pointing out that 'The defence minister called Palestinians in Gaza human animals. They said they would raise Gaza to the ground.'[286]

Similarly, in his HARDTalk interview on 17 October 2023 with Palestinian Ambassador to the UK Husam Zomlot: 'We have to believe the Defence Minister when he says Palestinians are simply human animals. Israel was preparing since 7th of October for these mass destructions. Israel was preparing for the mass slaughter, not of Hamas, but of my people. 2,800. Already 100 were killed until you got the last update and the numbers will rise. One thousand of those 2,800 are children. One thousand are still under rubble as we speak.'[287]

In broadcasts, Gallant's statement was put to the pro-Israel advocate Natasha Hausdorff in an interview. The interviewer said the 'court made specific reference to the language… specifically the comments from the Defence Minister you have, Gallant, that we are fighting human animals and we will act accordingly.' The interviewee responded by claiming the statement had been misrepresented: 'Gallant was talking about Hamas, not the Palestinian people,' and when challenged that Gallant 'did not qualify it,' insisted this was 'another one of the gross misrepresentations put forward by South Africa.'[288]

The BBC's inability to heed or even report on these genocidal warnings was recognised by the organisation's own listeners. On the BBC World Service's 'Over to You' feedback show in October 2023, caller Bill Amin Babalola said: 'I was amazed to hear the BBC on Newsday do what amounts to an interpretation or defence of the Defence Minister of Israel by stating that the Defence Minister probably meant Hamas when he referred to some people as human animals. It is not for the BBC to explain what it can certainly contextualise, by not assuming what a person probably meant or did not mean [sic]. Give us the information. Tell us the news. That is why we trust the BBC. That is what we expect and usually get when we tune in to the BBC Live.'[289] The programme did not directly address this point but was happy to address other matters.

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282 What the ICC arrest warrants mean for Israel and Hamas, BBC News, 21 May 2024 https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cw4490z75v3o

283 Harsh Israeli rhetoric against Palestinians becomes central to South Africa's genocide case, Associated Press, 18 January 2024, https://apnews.com/article/israel-palestinians-south-africa-genocide-hate-speech-97a9e4a84a3a6bebeddfb80f8a030724

284 Critical Mention, searching 'Human animals' and Israel across: BBC 1, BBC 2, BBC News, Radio 4, Radio 5 and World Service

285 BBC News at Six, BBC One and BBC News,, 9 October 2023, 18:07

286 BBC News channel, 11 October 2023, 16:20

287 HardTalk, BBC News, 16 October 2023, also at: https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m001rnhz

288 BBC News Channel, 26 January 2024, 21:14

289 Over to You, BBC World Service, 14 October 2023, https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/w3ct4rpx

One finds a rare example of a BBC interviewer referencing Gallant's statement in the correct context in an interview on the Today programme on 13 November 2023, where the interviewer Mishal Husain asked former UK Defence Minister James Heappey:

> **'Have you followed the extent of the way that many Israelis in official positions are talking about Palestinians? When an Israeli minister says we are rolling out the "Gaza Nakba", that's a reference to what Palestinians regard as a catastrophe between 1948 and 1949, when thousands were either forced from their homes or fled their homes because of the fear of violence. When the Israeli president says there are no innocent civilians in Gaza, when the defence minister says we will destroy everything and refers to Palestinians in Gaza as human animals, does that continue to strike you as a legitimate way to run a military operation?'**[290]

On 15 January, 2024, we saw an equally unusual example of good practice – but even then, diluted – when, still not directly quoting 'human animals', the interviewer questions Grant Shapps about Israeli atrocities and says: 'The defence minister said, 'We will eliminate everything", in relation to Gaza.'[291]

Gallant's consequential comments were referenced in some of the BBC's anniversary coverage of the 7 October attacks. Similar to his anniversary online reflection, Jeremy Bowen contextualised the statement alongside the human impact: 'Israel's Prime Minister Netanyahu promised a mighty vengeance. His defence minister said they were fighting human animals in Gaza and would act accordingly. Israel has damaged or destroyed nearly 60% of all Gaza's buildings, according to satellite analysis.'[292] While Bowen included the statement in his reporting, it appeared as a factual reference within his broader description of the war, without examining its potential legal significance as evidence of genocidal intent.

290 Today programme, BBC Radio 4, 13 November 2023, 08:20
291 Today programme, BBC Radio 4, 15 January 2024, 08:22
292 BBC News, various bulletins, 7 October 2024, 08:22

Dismissing allegations of genocide

The research has identified a concerning pattern in BBC interviews with regards to letting interviewees speak about allegations of Israeli genocide in Gaza. **In over 100 documented instances, BBC presenters actively shut down, challenged, or dismissed guests who raised the possibility of genocide taking place.** We document some of these in Section Three of this report. This pattern began just weeks after 7 October, with presenters like Kirsty Wark on Newsnight categorically stating that 'genocide is not what is happening here' when speaking with UN Special Rapporteur Francesca Albanese.[293] Similar interventions continued across BBC platforms with presenters consistently countering expert opinions, Palestinian voices, and even diplomatic representatives who attempted to raise this serious allegation.

This persistent editorial approach appears systemic rather than coincidental, with presenters from Radio 5 Live, BBC News Channel, Today Programme, and Newsnight all employing similar tactics – immediately offering Israel's denial, questioning the use of the term, or pivoting discussions back to Hamas and 7 October. The report details examples in Section Three examining the BBC's approach to interviews.

A clear case study of the BBC deliberately suppressing allegations of genocide can be seen in news reports as well. In her acceptance speech of the Turner Prize on 3 December 2024, artist Jasleen Kaur referenced the plight of the Palestinians and criticised the award organisers by saying 'one thousand three hundred and ten signatories in just a week calling for you Tate to sever ties with organisations complicit in what the UN and ICJ are finally getting closer to saying is a genocide of the Palestinian people.'[294]

As it customarily did for previous events, the BBC covered the speech in broadcast. However, the online article shown below made no mention of Kaur's comments on Palestine, and did not even include a photo of Kaur accepting the award donning a 'Free Palestine' scarf.[295]

293 Kirsty Walk to Francesca Albanese, Newsnight, BBC2, 30 October, 2023, 10:52

294 Museum Association, 5 December 2024, https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/news/2024/12/turner-prize-winner-calls-on-tate-to-cut-ties-with-israel-linked-organisations/

295 Art showcasing Scottish Sikh community wins Turner Prize, 3 December 2024 https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c3e3982dz8ko

As detailed in Section Three, this pattern is consistent with how other serious allegations against Israel are handled in BBC interviews, raising questions about whether the corporation has taken an institutional position on refusing to allow this particular claim to be articulated without challenge.

This deliberate minimisation of genocide allegations extends to the BBC's online news coverage. For example, when reporting on Human Rights Watch's December 2024 accusation that Israel was committing 'acts of genocide' through water deprivation,[296] the BBC's headline completely omitted any reference to genocide, instead focusing on the 'war crime of forced displacement.'[297] In the middle of the article, we are told that 'the forced displacement of any civilians inside an occupied territory is prohibited, while the genocide allegation is relegated to the penultimate paragraph, attributing it to 'a UN General Assembly special committee' rather than Human Rights Watch. The article also allocates significantly more space to Israel's defence, quoting lengthy statements that the IDF 'only operates in areas in which there is known to be a military presence' and that evacuation orders are 'made in accordance with...international law.'

By contrast, CNN headlined its report explicitly with: 'Human Rights Watch accuses Israel of genocide by "deliberately" restricting water in Gaza' and provided specific details about how water restriction constitutes genocide under international law.[298] What is ironic with this case is that the BBC did conduct an investigation on this issue a few months earlier in May, using satellite imagery to meticulously document the IDF's attack on water and sanitation facilities and stating that the 'destruction comes despite Israel's duty to protect critical infrastructure under the rules of war.'[299]

296 Op.Cit., Human Rights Warch, 19 December 2024 https://www.hrw.org/report/2024/12/19/extermination-and-acts-genocide/israel-deliberately-depriving-palestinians-gaza

297 HRW accuses Israel of war crime of forced displacement in Gaza, BBC News, 14 November 2024 https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/ce8ygyem84jo

298 Human Rights Watch accuses Israel of genocide by 'deliberately' restricting water in Gaza, CNN, 19 December 2024, https://edition.cnn.com/2024/12/19/middleeast/hrw-israel-genocide-restricting-water-intl/index.html

299 Half of Gaza water sites damaged or destroyed, BBC satellite data reveals, BBC News, 9 May 2024 https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-68969239

In another example, the BBC covered Special Rapporteur Francesca Albanese's March 2024 report where she gave further evidence of Israel committing 'acts of genocide' in Gaza. The article quickly established that 'Israel has already dismissed her findings', describing how Israel has been angered by the UN Human Rights Council for many years. After mentioning 'Hamas's brutal attack' which was condemned by Albanese, the article gives Palestinian and Israeli reactions to the report. Indicative of the BBC's approach, the Palestinian reaction is provided by a human rights lawyer, while the Israeli reaction is not only given by an Israeli ambassador, but also by Noam Peri, whose father Chaim was taken hostage. The contrast here is that the Israeli reaction is humanised through a personal story that evokes empathy, with direct quotes about her father being 'brutally taken' and having 'essentially disappeared', while the Palestinian perspective remains abstract and institutional.[300]

The flaw in the BBC's editorial position can be seen in a separate complaint it upheld objecting to a World at One programme featuring General Romeo Dallaire, commander of the UN Peacekeeping force in Rwanda, asking him to consider whether there were parallels between the Rwanda genocide and Gaza. The BBC's Executive Complaints Unit agreed 'the item overall gave the impression of implicit agreement that Israeli action in Gaza amounted to genocide. Because the question of genocide in relation to Gaza is highly controversial, the item fell below the BBC's standards of impartiality by not challenging the impression of consensus or reflecting an alternative viewpoint.'[301]

For another complaint about a Newsnight programme aired on 18 September 2024, the BBC said: 'While making a variety of points about Israel's new strategy against Hezbollah, a contributor wrongly stated that the ICJ said what had happened in Gaza is "plausible genocide". To be clear the ICJ actually decided that the Palestinians had a right to be protected from genocide.'[302]

Accusations of genocide are serious and not to be regarded lightly. However, given the scale of deaths and the volume of evidence, a pattern is identified through the data where the BBC is at best nervous, at worst, resistant to any notion that the Israeli government must be held accountable to accusations of genocide.

300 Gaza war: UN rights expert accuses Israel of acts of genocide, BBC News, 26 March 2024 https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-68667556

301 The World at One, Radio 4, 20 February 2024, BBC Executive Complaints Unit, 6 June 2024 https://www.bbc.co.uk/contact/ecu/the-world-at-one-radio-4-20-february-2024

302 Corrections and Clarifications - Archive 2024, BBC, 2024 https://www.bbc.co.uk/helpandfeedback/corrections_clarifications/archive-2024

Failing to call out war crimes

In 2024, the Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention drew attention to a BBC article on US efforts to send humanitarian aid to Gaza, explaining how it failed to 'stress that such measures are required because Israel refuses to let aid in through conventional routes.'[303] In short, the BBC does not sufficiently explain to audiences 'why' something is happening.

On a daily basis, for almost two years, the Israeli authorities have perpetrated what many have argued to be war crimes. Hospitals and schools are a case in point, having repeatedly been attacked alongside doctors, ambulances and journalists. Did the BBC apply the term 'war crime' to these attacks?

In our dataset of 3,873 articles from 7 October 2023 to 7 October 2024, the term 'war crimes' against the Palestinians was mentioned in just 121 BBC articles (3%).[304]

We demonstrate later in Section Eight how, in its coverage on Ukraine, the BBC discusses war crimes in Ukraine almost three times as much as in Gaza, mentioning Russia as the perpetrator 2.7 times as often as it mentions Israel as the perpetrator of war crimes. By contrast it seems to minimise, soften and even evade mention of similar actions by Israel.

When it comes to Gaza, we struggle to find those observations made unless raised by others. For example, in the BBC Verify investigation of soldier misconduct mentioned above, it is left to legal experts to make the determination, and the IDF to give its usual response.[305]

The BBC has defended its reluctance to describe Israel's actions for what they are: war crimes. That term was absent in a BBC Verify revelation of videos showing Israeli soldiers filming and sharing footage of Palestinian detainees who are stripped, bound, blindfolded, and subjected to public exposure. The report cites human rights experts and, like the aforementioned article on Ukraine, observes that: 'Article 13 of the Third Geneva Convention states prisoners of war must be protected at all times, particularly against acts of violence or intimidation and against 'insults and public curiosity'.

The BBC's reluctance to use the words 'war crime' has been picked up by viewers too. For example, in a report on an attack on a hospital in the West Bank where Israel targeted patients, one complaint stated that the BBC 'failed to mention that one of the targeted men had been undergoing treatment at the time, thereby diverting attention from what amounted to a war crime in a way which was neither accurate nor impartial.'[306] The complaint was rejected.

303 Statement on the Western Media Narrative Regarding Israel's Genocide in Gaza, Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention, 13 April 2024 https://www.lemkininstitute.com/statements-new-page/statement-on-the-western-media-narrative-regarding-israel%E2%80%99s-genocide-in-gaza-

304 See Appendix 2: LLM Classification Methodology #14

305 Israel to act on soldier misconduct after BBC investigation, BBC News, 12 October 2024, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-68277124

306 BBC News (10pm), BBC One, 30 January 2024, BBC Executive Complaints Unit, 28 March 2024, https://www.bbc.co.uk/contact/ecu/bbc-news-10pm-bbc-one-30-january-2024

Excusing perpetrators

The BBC's systemic unwillingness to properly attribute the perpetrators of violence against Palestinians can be seen through attacks on medical personnel. According to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, it is a war crime to intentionally 'directing attacks against buildings, material, medical units and transport, and personnel using the distinctive emblems of the Geneva Conventions in conformity with international law constitutes a war crime in international armed conflicts.'[307]

The World Health Organization (WHO) has reported at least 670 health attacks from 7 October 2023 to 14 March 2025, including 122 healthcare facilities and 33 hospitals damaged.[308] In one article, the BBC leads with a warning from WHO (which states the dire situation faced at Palestinians hospitals), but fails to present WHO's facts when reporting an Israeli attack on the Al-Ahli Baptist Hospital, the last remaining hospital in Gaza City.[309] As with so many other crucial contextual omissions, such information is not regularly featured in BBC reports. In this piece, attacks on Palestinian medical infrastructure and first-responders do not receive the same consistent attention and flagging that the BBC provides when describing Gaza's Health Ministry as 'Hamas-run'. The article also had space to include stock Israeli denials: 'Israeli military said it hit a "command-and-control centre" used by Hamas to plan attacks'.

The Al-Ahli Hospital was first attacked right from the outset of the war and has been attacked six times since. The facility was subject to controversy after an explosion at the hospital on 17 October 2023, leading to mass casualties. There has been continued speculation[310] as to the party responsible for the explosion at the facility that day, necessitating an independent inquiry. There was an organised campaign to force the BBC to re-assign attribution of this explosion away from the Israeli military, leading to a detailed response and an acknowledgement that: 'it was not consistent with the BBC's standards of due accuracy to offer any view about responsibility for the incident at a point where so little reliable information was available.'[311] While the BBC did not uphold this complaint, their response is indicative of a systematic nervousness to identify and give proper attribution to Israeli attacks.

In our previous report, we highlighted how the BBC Verify team's conclusion about the Al-Ahli Hospital explosion was criticised for relying exclusively on Western security experts with potential pro-Israel interests (including one from a think tank with a former Mossad chief on its board), without proper disclosure of these connections – similar to how the BBC failed to disclose Richard Kemp's leadership of an IDF-funded charity when featuring him as a terrorism expert on Newsnight.[312]

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307 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, Article 8(2)(b)(xxiv)

308 oPt Emergency Situation Update, World Health Organization, Issue 57, 7 Oct 2023 - 14 Mar 2025, https://www.emro.who.int/images/stories/Sitrep_57.pdf?ua=1

309 Conditions at Gaza hospitals 'beyond description' after Israeli attacks, WHO says, BBC News, 14 April 2025, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c89g0yn5yv5o

310 Israeli Disinformation, Al-Ahli Hospital, 15 February 2024, https://forensic-architecture.org/investigation/israeli-disinformation-al-ahli-hospital

311 The Context, BBC News Channel, 17 October 2023 and related items, BBC Executive Complaints Unit, 23 November 2023, https://www.bbc.co.uk/contact/ecu/the-context-bbc-news-channel-17-october-2023-and-related-items

312 Media Bias Gaza 2023-24, Centre for Media Monitoring, March 2024, p. 101 https://cfmm.org.uk/cfmm-report-media-bias-gaza-2023-24/

As early as 15 October 2023, the BBC blind spot was picked up by the Palestinian Ambassador to the UK, Husam Zomlot. Speaking on the BBC's Sunday with Laura Kuenssberg programme (but interviewed by Victoria Derbyshire) on 15 October 2023, Zomlot responded to the previous interviewee, Israeli government spokesperson Mark Regev, who claimed 'We are not going to target hospitals, let's be clear here.' Zomlot challenged this stating: 'I just hope the BBC will challenge this because this has gone on for a long time. He just claimed that Israel did not and will not target hospitals. Yesterday, one of the major hospitals was bombarded. We have statements by the Archbishop, the Palestinian Archbishop of the Anglican Church, all the churches in Jerusalem and here in the UK condemning that act. These lies live on camera that Israel sticks to the rules of international law. Seriously?'[313]

Case study: the murder of Gaza medics, April 2025

Outside of our dataset, we look at a recent case study involving the killing of humanitarian workers in Gaza. Evidence compiled shows that the BBC is likely to repeat Israeli justifications of attacks on hospitals and medical personnel. The Israeli claim of hospitals being Hamas 'command-and-control centres' features regularly, such as in an article where WHO warned that bodies could not be buried at Al-Shifa Hospital.[314] The BBC's Executive Complaints Unit rejected a complaint about an accompanying broadcast that 'allowed Israel to "frame events" concerning fighting around the Al-Shifa hospital in such a way that the coverage offered on the subject was 'biased, distorted and misleading'.[315] They argued that the coverage 'reflected what was known at the time about the fighting around the hospital and, in the absence of information from independent sources on the ground, reflected both Israeli and Palestinian perspectives.'

That framing extends to another recent Israeli atrocity: the murder of Palestinian humanitarian workers murdered and buried on 23 March 2025. The BBC first broke the story on 31 March. Its headline (now updated) was notable because it began by stating that the Red Cross was outraged – though the act itself was outrageous – and, initially, did not mention who killed the medics.[316] Moreover, the story did not receive front-page coverage – and one can only conjecture how much more attention it would have received had it been Hamas fighters (not Israeli troops) killing aid workers, hypothetically speaking.[317] For broadcast, the story broke at 23:51 on 31 March and appeared at 08:21 the day after on 1 April. It was not featured on the main bulletins later that evening.[318]

313 Sunday with Laura Kuenssberg, BBC One, 15 October 2023, 09:00-09:30

314 Al-Shifa: WHO says Gaza hospital unable to bury dead bodies, BBC News, 13 November 2023, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-67410093

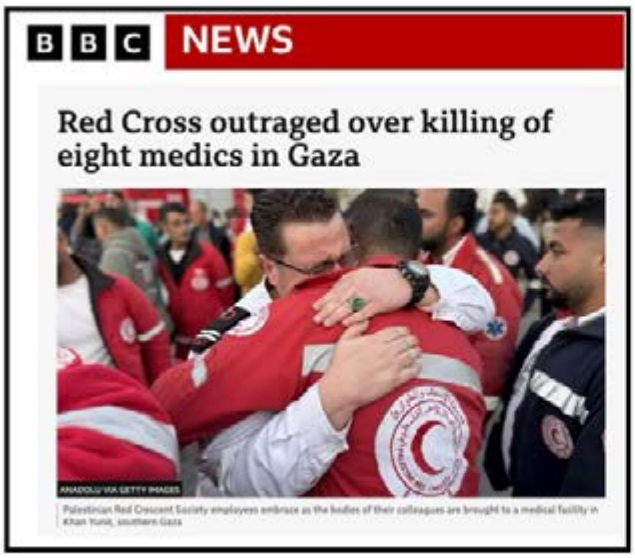
315 News (1pm), Radio 4, 11 November 2023, BBC Executive Complaints Unit, 18 January 2024, https://www.bbc.co.uk/contact/ecu/news-1pm-radio-4-11-november-2023

316 Red Cross outraged over killing of medics by Israeli forces in Gaza, BBC News, 31 March 2025, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/crkxm1rg6k1o Original headline: 'Red Cross outraged over killing of eight medics in Gaza' https://web.archive.org/web/20250331014037/https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/crkxm1rg6k1o

317 BBC News home page, via Internet Archive, 1 April 2025, https://web.archive.org/web/20250401095426/https://www.bbc.com/news

318 As picked up through the Critical Mention media monitoring service

BEFORE



AFTER

The BBC has covered the story since, carrying several articles covering the attack. It belatedly followed[319] other news outlets when the New York Times[320] released a video from phone footage of one of the attacked humanitarian aid workers, contradicting earlier Israeli accounts of targeting Hamas fighters. BBC Verify did conduct an investigation to validate the audio of the video.[321] However, it appears that Sky News covered the story with much more granular detail, as exemplified in its investigation on 22 April 2025.[322]

We should also compare and contrast how the correspondents of both broadcasters dealt with suggestions that this may be a war crime. Sky News' Alistair Bunkall said:

> **'Is that a breach of international law? Is that a war crime? That is not for journalists to determine, but for international lawyers to determine. But this might very well form a part of cases that are currently being heard and pushed through international courts and, of course, there are many people, as we know, who do believe that Israel is guilty of that. Not yet proven, I should point out, but this could be partly evidence to help their case.'**[323]

319 BBC Verify analyses video showing Israel's killing of Gaza medics, 7 April 2025, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/videos/cj9e22dezeno

320 Video Shows Aid Workers Killed in Gaza Under Gunfire Barrage, With Ambulance Lights On, New York Times, 4 April 2025, https://www.nytimes.com/2025/04/04/world/middleeast/gaza-israel-aid-workers-deaths-video.html

321 Israeli army fired more than 100 shots in Gaza medics' killing, audio suggests, BBC News, 10 April 2025, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/ckg55q1w58jo

322 Two hours of terror: Sky News investigation reveals how Israel's deadly attack on aid workers unfolded, 22 April 2025, https://news.sky.com/story/two-hours-of-terror-sky-news-investigation-reveals-how-israels-deadly-attack-on-aid-workers-unfolded-13348776

323 Sky News, 5 April 2025, 17:06

Yolande Knell on the BBC said:

> **'This is continuing to generate so much controversy. On the one hand you have these allegations that Israel has committed an apparent war crime, a clear breach of international humanitarian law, but the Israeli military in its latest statement has stressed these were vehicles it says were acting suspiciously and appeared to pose a direct threat to Israeli forces who were operating in the area.'**[324]

In this controversy, Sky News has stood out consistently in its investigation and scrutiny of Israeli claims.[325] When the Israeli government finally admitted that the atrocity took place and that humanitarian workers were killed, the BBC gave the news headline coverage on 21 April 2025, along with space for Israeli responses that this was an 'operational misunderstanding by the troops'.[326]

The Israel authorities, for its part, activated its usual crisis communications response whenever it is found to have committed atrocities: deflection, denial, qualified admission and then finally inaction, as illustrated in the table.

This is a case study that bears all the hallmarks of the BBC unable or unwilling to cover Israeli atrocities as they should: within the context of a genocide. In addition to being slow off the mark, the BBC gave space to Israeli denials without sufficient scrutiny. It failed to highlight that the Israeli authorities have a history of issuing falsehoods and obfuscations after they commit atrocities – the most relevant example here is the killing of the Palestinian-American journalist Shireen Abu Akleh.

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324 BBC News channel, 1 April 2025, 10:14
325 Sky News, 5 April 2025, https://x.com/SkyNews/status/1908447148053557338
326 BBC News at Ten, BBC One, 20 April 2025, 22:01

Table 6: Six stages of denial: how the BBC reported the Gaza medic murders

Israeli Response Stage	Israeli Response Quote	BBC Article Title
STAGE ONE **DEFLECTION**	'Israel's military said troops fired on vehicles "advancing suspiciously" without headlights or emergency signals. **It said a Hamas operative and "eight other terrorists" were among those killed.**'	Red Cross outraged over killing of medics by Israeli forces in Gaza - **31 March 2025**
STAGE TWO **DENIAL**	'**The IDF did not randomly attack an ambulance**," Israel's Foreign Minister Gideon Saar claimed, when questioned at a news conference, echoing the IDF's statements. "Several uncoordinated vehicles were identified advancing suspiciously toward IDF troops without headlights or emergency signals. IDF troops then opened fire at the suspected vehicles.'	Survivor challenges Israeli account of attack on Gaza paramedics - **2 April 2025**
STAGE THREE **DAMAGE CONTROL**	'All claims, including the documentation circulating about the incident, **will be thoroughly and deeply examined** to understand the sequence of events and the handling of the situation.'	Video footage appears to contradict Israeli account of Gaza medic killings - **5 April 2025**
STAGE FOUR **DIMINISHED ADMISSION**	**'Israel's army has admitted its soldiers made mistakes over the killing of 15 emergency workers** in southern Gaza on 23 March... Israel has **admitted its earlier account claiming the vehicles approached without lights was inaccurate,** attributing the report to the troops involved.'	Israel changes account of Gaza medic killings after video showed deadly attack - **6 April 2025**
STAGE FIVE **DISCIPLINARY OPTICS**	'The Israeli military has said "professional failures" led to the killing of 15 emergency workers in Gaza last month... The **deputy commander of the unit involved has been dismissed** "for providing an incomplete and inaccurate report during the debrief".'	'Professional failures' led to killing of Gaza medics, IDF inquiry says - **20 April 2025**
STAGE SIX **DILUTED ACCOUNTABILITY**	'All the claims raised regarding the incident will be examined through the mechanism and **presented in a detailed and thorough manner** for a decision on how to handle the event.'	Palestinian Red Crescent says Israeli report into Gaza medics' killings 'full of lies' - **21 April 2025**

Reporting on ethnic cleansing

While the term ethnic cleansing is not recognised in international law, a UN Commission of Experts looking into violations in the former Yugoslavia described the term as '... a purposeful policy designed by one ethnic or religious group to remove by violent and terror-inspiring means the civilian population of another ethnic or religious group from certain geographic areas.' It added that such acts 'could also fall within the meaning of the Genocide Convention.'[327]

The BBC has referred to ethnic cleansing in only 17 articles.[328]

In October 2024, the Special Rapporteur for Palestinian human rights issued a report highlighting 'patterns of conduct that evidence an intent to employ genocidal acts as a means to ethnically cleanse all or parts of the occupied Palestinian territory.'[329]

We have found that, in broadcast, correspondents from other media outlets are more prepared to call out ethnic cleansing for what it is than their BBC counterparts. For example, in February 2025, US President Donald Trump floated ideas that would effectively formalise the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians in Gaza. The Centre for Media Monitoring tracked how other media outlets, such as the Guardian and Al Jazeera (unlike the BBC), headlined these proposals as they should be described: ethnic cleansing.[330] In a hard-hitting reaction, Sky News' Alistair Bunkall said:

> **'I think most people think it is entirely unrealistic for so many reasons. Practically, how could it happen? I mean, how do you forcibly displace two million Gazans without it becoming a breach of international law, without it being ethnic cleansing? And who's going to take them?'**[331]

327 Definitions of Genocide and Related Crimes, UN Office on Genocide and the Responsibility to Protect, https://www.un.org/en/genocide-prevention/definition
328 Identified through a keyword search of our dataset.
329 Situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, United Nations, A/79/384, https://docs.un.org/en/A/79/384
330 Centre for Media Monitoring on X, 28 January 2025, https://x.com/cfmmuk/status/1884304676482650294
331 Sky News, 5 February 2025, 07:11

The BBC also fell short in covering several specific Israeli acts of ethnic cleansing, such as its operations in the Occupied West Bank in August 2024, as per the section below.

Case Study: Israeli War Crimes in Jenin

The BBC's coverage of Israel's August 2024 Jenin attack contrasts sharply with UN assessments of the same events. While the UN Human Rights Office explicitly stated that Israel's actions 'may amount to the collective punishment of the Palestinian population, which is a war crime,'[332] the BBC regularly framed the events through an Israeli security lens. For example, on 29 August Lucy Williamson described it on BBC Breakfast primarily as a 'counterterrorist operation' driven by 'fears within Israel about the possibility of Iran funding and arming the armed Palestinian groups.'[333] The BBC did not state if it had seen any evidence, or not, of Iranian involvement.

The BBC consistently used passive language when describing Palestinian casualties: 'At least 36 Palestinians were killed',[334] compared to the UN's direct attribution: 'Israeli security forces have killed 36 Palestinians, including eight children.'[335] BBC headlines further neutralised responsibility: 'Families leave Jenin camp in Israel West Bank push' rather than indicating forced displacement, and 'Israeli forces pull out of Jenin after major operation' focusing on military movements rather than humanitarian consequences.[336]

As with Lucy Williamson's BBC Breakfast comments, when Palestinian voices were included, they were frequently subordinated to Israeli military justifications. After quoting a distressed mother saying: "They were firing at us and throwing hand-grenades at homes... we were hiding in the kitchen and shouting to tell them that we have a baby" the article immediately pivots to, 'Israel says it has killed 20 armed fighters in the operation and recovered weapons.' When a 16-year-old Palestinian girl was shot in the head by an Israeli sniper as she looked out the window of her home near Jenin, the BBC article put quotes around 'killed in her own home' in the headline whilst omitting the fact that she was killed by an Israeli sniper.[337]

While reporting infrastructure destruction, the BBC avoided terms like 'siege' or 'collective punishment' that appeared in the UN report cited above, instead using more neutral phrasing like 'sealed off' to describe the Jenin camp.[338]

The contrast is evident when comparing descriptions of damage to infrastructure. Where the UN directly stated that 'IDF destroyed...homes, shops, roads as well as water, sewage and electricity infrastructure,' the BBC reported more ambiguously that 'families were confined to their homes and utilities cut.'

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332 UN Human Rights in Occupied Palestinian Territory, 'Israeli security forces have killed 36 Palestinians, including eight children, in 10 days during an operation in northern West Bank,' 6 September 2024. https://www.un.org/unispal/document/ohchr-press-release-west-bank-attacks-06sep24/

333 Lucy Williamson, BBC Breakfast, 29 August 2024.

334 Lucy Williamson and Raffi Berg, 'Israeli forces pull out of Jenin after major operation', BBC News, 6 September 2024, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cpdl751l3djo

335 Op. Cit., UN Human Rights in Occupied Palestinian Territory

336 Families leave Jenin camp in Israel West Bank push, BBC News, 31 August 2024 https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c78lr40el27o

337 Mallory Moench & David Gritten, Girl 'killed inside home' as Israeli West Bank operation continues, BBC News, 4 September 2024, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cpdl3veg1l4o

338 Inside the sealed-off Jenin refugee camp targeted by IDF, BBC News, 29 August 2024, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c8ergpxnd8xo

BBC's coverage of international legal proceedings

The proceedings at the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court represent pivotal moments in the legal assessment of Israel's war on Gaza. These international legal forums are tasked with evaluating evidence of potential genocide and war crimes — matters of exceptional public interest that demand thorough, prominent coverage from major news organisations like the BBC to fulfil their public service mandate.

Overall, the BBC has mentioned the International Court of Justice in 92 articles. [339]

In the Centre for Media Monitoring's 'Media Bias: Gaza 2023-24', significant deficiencies in the BBC's approach to these critical legal proceedings were highlighted. This was a landmark legal development that would hold the occupying power in particular to account. When the ICJ began to hear arguments in 2024, the report looked at how the BBC reporting largely sidelined coverage of South Africa's genocide case against Israel at the ICJ, while carrying Israel's defence live on the BBC News channel.[340]

Giving evidence to the House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport Committee, David Jordan, the BBC's Director, Editorial Policy and Standards claimed that both sides were given equal airtime in the BBC's international output but South Africa's case had to give way to the Post Office scandal the previous day.[341] The same was said by the BBC's Executive Complaints Unit who received numerous objections about the disparity. They also argued that the BBC news channel did 'inform its viewers about South Africa's arguments in the news bulletins.'[342] We checked the primetime BBC News at Ten programme for 11 and 12 January 2024. The ICJ case was featured roughly at the same time on both days (South Africa, 11th, 22:18 GMT/Israel 12th 22:24 GMT).

On both days, the response to the Houthi attacks on Red Sea shipping (attacks carried out, the Houthis claim, in solidarity with the Palestinians) were the top items for both days. However, the ICJ case did not follow the top story. In keeping with the pattern identified, the BBC programme introduced the South Africa case tightly with Israel's counter-response: 'The United Nation's highest court, the International Court of Justice in The Hague, has heard from lawyers for the South African government that Israel's military offensive in Gaza amounts to genocide. Israel has strongly denied this , calling it an outrageous allegation.'[343]

After highlighting the plight of the Palestinians and then stating the South African charge, Paul Adams in his report states: 'But what is genocide? According to a 1948 convention, it is a crime committed with the intent to destroy a national, ethnic, racial or religious group in whole or in part. Israel says it was acting in self-defence, following the murderous Hamas assault of October the 7th, the worst attack on Jews since the Holocaust.[344]

339 Identified through keyword and key phrase searches.
340 Media Bias Gaza 2023-24, Centre for Media Monitoring, March 2024, p. 12 https://cfmm.org.uk/cfmm-report-media-bias-gaza-2023-24/
341 Oral evidence: The work of the BBC, HC 472, House of Commons, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 20 March 2024, Q. 13, https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/14525/html/
342 BBC News, News Channel,11 January 2024, BBC Editorial and Complaints Unit, 29 February 2024 https://www.bbc.co.uk/contact/ecu/bbc-news-news-channel11-january-2024
343 BBC News at Ten, 11 January 2024, 20:18
344 BBC News channel and BBC One, 11 January 2024, 22:18

After hearing deliberations, the ICJ order on 26 January explicitly stated: 'Israel must... take all measures within its power to prevent the commission of all acts within the scope of Article II of the Genocide Convention' and 'take immediate and effective measures to enable the provision of urgently needed basic services and humanitarian assistance'. Noting its significance, legal experts such as Balkees Jarrah from Human Rights Watch said: 'The World Court's landmark decision puts Israel and its allies on notice that immediate action is needed to prevent genocide and further atrocities against Palestinians in Gaza.'[345]

Since then, it has been revealed that BBC staff have also objected to the BBC's muted coverage on this crucial issue. In February 2024, 25 BBC journalists, including senior correspondents and producers directly covering the conflict, wrote to management expressing concern that the ICJ's ruling was not being given 'due prominence' in the BBC's output. Their letter, according to Novara Media, suggested this inattention could constitute a 'public disservice' and noted the ruling was not adequately reflected in interviews with government representatives or regularly included as context in reportage — even where directly relevant, such as in coverage of Israel's blocking of humanitarian aid to Gaza.[346]

Novara Media claims that Jonathan Munro, the BBC's global director of BBC News responded to the group, denying their claims and stated: 'Whether or not Israel has committed genocide is still being assessed by the ICJ and could take years. To be precise the ICJ called on Israel to take all measures to prevent genocidal acts in Gaza, but stopped short of telling it to halt the war.'

On 25 April 2024, Joan Donoghue, the former president of the International Court of Justice, was interviewed by the BBC's HARDTalk programme where she stated that the Court's historic order from January did not necessarily state there was a plausible genocide taking place in Palestine, rather that the court recognised the Palestinians' right to protection from genocide and the risk of irreparable harm to this right, while also affirming South Africa's right to bring the case to court.[347]

Yet, since that interview, arrest warrants have been issued against Israeli Prime Minister and former Israeli defence minister Yoav Gallant (alongside now dead leaders of Hamas). The BBC previewed the warrants prior to their formal issuance on 20 May 2024. The article, headlined 'Alarm in Israel at reports of possible ICC legal action over Gaza' from 2 May 2024, foregrounded Israeli concerns, giving prominence to the worries of those potentially facing charges rather than the plight of Palestinian victims in Gaza.[348]

BBC NEWS

Alarm in Israel at reports of possible ICC legal action over Gaza

2 May 2024

By Anna Foster & Raffi Berg

345 Gaza: World Court Orders Israel to Prevent Genocide, Human RIghts Watch, 2024 https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/01/26/gaza-world-court-orders-israel-prevent-genocide

346 BBC Exec Downplayed Israel 'Plausible Genocide' Ruling to Dismayed Colleagues, Novara Media, 9 January 2025 https://novaramedia.com/2025/01/09/bbc-exec-downplayed-israel-plausible-genocide-ruling-to-dismayed-colleagues/

347 BBC Hardtalk, 25 April 2024, https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m001yplc

348 Alarm in Israel at reports of possible ICC legal action over Gaza, BBC News, 2 May 2024, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-68938022

Netanyahu stands accused of 'war crimes of starvation as a method of warfare and of intentionally directing an attack against the civilian population; and the crimes against humanity of murder, persecution, and other inhumane acts from at least 8 October 2023 until at least 20 May 2024.'[349] Meanwhile, the ICJ has issued several additional orders, including further provisional measures in March and May 2024, and an advisory opinion in July 2024, all ordering Israel to prevent genocidal acts in Gaza, ensure humanitarian aid access, and take specific steps regarding its actions in Rafah. This is coupled by several international human rights organisations and experts – as stated above – now describing the situation in the region as a genocide.

Yet, several BBC articles have anchored analysis of genocide claims to Donoghue's HARDTalk intervention. When the ICJ was hearing Israel's response to a case seeking an emergency halt to its offensive in Rafah in May 2024, the BBC's Dominic Casciani examined the ICJ's ruling by centering his analysis around Joan Donoghue April interview.[350]

A few days later, the BBC's online Middle East Editor, Raffi Berg again looked at the issue after cases were heard from both sides and before the ICJ was due to deliberate. After signposting right from the start that Israel 'rejects the allegation of genocide as "baseless"', the reader is also reminded that Joan Donoghue, 'told the BBC in April that the ICJ did not decide that there was a plausible case for genocide, but rather that the Palestinians had a right to be protected from genocide.'[351] When Dominic Casciani reported on the ICJ's ruling a few days later on 28 May, Donoghue's April statement gave way to an analysis on the 'contested' nature of the ruling.[352]

The BBC's approach to this crucial pillar of international law continues to this day, reflected in the absence of routine reminders that both the ICJ and ICC are attempting to prevent Israeli impunity. Those bodies are now de-legitimised by the Israeli government and their backers in the White House, as was echoed by former BBC presenter Stephen Sackur's question to the UN Human Rights Chief, Volker Turk in March 2025: '[The Israelis] accuse the courts of acting with anti-Semitic motive, according to Prime Minister Netanyahu. Do you still believe that the ICC and the ICJ have international credibility?'.[353]

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349 International Criminal Court, https://www.icc-cpi.int/defendant/netanyahu, see also: Situation in the State of Palestine: ICC Pre-Trial Chamber I rejects the State of Israel's challenges to jurisdiction and issues warrants of arrest for Benjamin Netanyahu and Yoav Gallant, ICC, 21 November 2024, https://www.icc-cpi.int/news/situation-state-palestine-icc-pre-trial-chamber-i-rejects-state-israels-challenges

350 What did ICJ ruling mean in South Africa's genocide case against Israel?, BBC News, 16 May 2024, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c3g9g63jl17o

351 What is South Africa's genocide case against Israel at the ICJ?, BBC News, 24 May 2024, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-67922346

352 What does the ICJ's ruling on Israel's Rafah offensive mean?, BBC News, 28 May 2024 https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c722zv1r5yro

353 BBC HARDtalk, BBC News channel, 5 March 2025, 00:48

Recommendations

Investigate shortcomings in highlighting genocidal statements: Israeli leaders had signalled their genocidal intent which has been carried out as intended since 7 October 2023. The BBC needs to investigate its shortcoming in failing to alert its audiences about this.

Connect patterns of evidence: With thousands of airstrikes and thousands more killed, the BBC should not be treating acts of Israeli violence in isolation.

Apply the war crimes framework consistently: Use the term 'war crime' based on objective criteria of international law rather than selectively applying it to some conflicts but not others.

Present international legal proceedings factually and in a timely manner: Report on international legal proceedings without minimising their significance, including the International Court of Justice's 'plausible genocide' finding.

Do not shut down genocide allegations: Permit experts, officials, and witnesses to express their assessment of whether actions constitute genocide without immediate editorial dismissal. If the Israeli perspective must be provided, then those of respected neutral and international (humanitarian) organisations on the topic, should also be provided.

Remind audiences that Israeli leaders are war crimes suspects: Routinely reference that Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu and former Defence Minister Yoav Gallant are wanted for war crimes by the International Criminal Court when reporting on their statements or actions.

6. ‘HOSTAGES’ VERSUS ‘PRISONERS’

Key Findings

- **Contrasting terminology:** Israelis taken by Hamas and other groups into Gaza were consistently described as **‘hostages’** whilst Palestinians detained by Israel, even those held without charge, were labelled as **‘prisoners’**, thereby implying criminality and reinforcing Israeli government narratives.
- **Extreme disparity in coverage of detainees:** Despite a significantly larger number of Palestinians being detained over a longer period of time **(10,000 v 251, a ratio of 40:1)**, including many more children, Israeli hostages were mentioned **5.3 times more** than Palestinian detainees (1238 vs 231).
- **Concealing administrative detention:** Only **six** BBC articles referenced **‘administrative detention’**, Israel’s practice of **holding Palestinians without charge**, despite it affecting thousands, including hundreds of children.
- **Contrasting human experiences:** During the January 2025 hostage exchanges, **70%** of articles **focused on Israeli hostages** despite 90 Palestinians being released compared to just three Israelis. BBC TV/radio ran emotionally engaging and humanising stories about Israeli hostages returning home, while Palestinian detainees remained nameless, with coverage focusing on procedural aspects rather than personal narratives.

The treatment of forcibly detained individuals – be they Israeli or Palestinian – presents another critical test of narrative balance. The kidnapping of some 251 Israeli civilians and soldiers since 7 October 2023 has been a, if not the, focal point of media reporting during this war. The circumstances in which they have been abducted, their conditions and (in some cases) deaths has been covered extensively.

Less well known are the circumstances in which Palestinians have been held. By the end of 2024, 10,000 Palestinians were being held by Israel – approximately 40 times the number of Israelis taken on 7 October.

Our dataset between 2023 and 2024, alongside case studies from 2025 when Israelis and Palestinians were exchanged prior to Israel once again breaking the ceasefire in March 2025, clearly shows the disparities in the coverage.

The research reveals a contrast in how Israeli and Palestinian captives are portrayed. **Despite Palestinians in Israeli custody outnumbering Israeli hostages by 40:1 (10,000 vs 251), Israeli hostages were mentioned 5.3 times more frequently in BBC articles (1,238 vs 231 articles).**[354]

The BBC's coverage of Palestinians forcibly and illegally held also merits scrutiny. Beyond the journalistic importance of comparing the scale of detentions, audiences were not given the full context and perspectives.

Many Palestinian captives – some of whom are children – have not been charged with any offence. According to the UN the practice of torture and sexual abuse of Palestinian detainees is 'widespread and systemic', with some being killed in custody, due to the abuse.[355]

This imbalance extends beyond numbers into clear differences in terminology and portrayal. Israelis are consistently described as 'hostages' whilst Palestinians, even those held without charge, are labelled as 'prisoners' – implying criminality, when many are detainees, held without trial. When the BBC accidentally described Israeli captives as 'prisoners' in January 2025, an immediate public retraction followed.

During prisoner exchanges, the BBC's coverage of Israeli releases featured emotionally engaging, humanised 'heartwarming reunions' while Palestinians remained largely nameless, with coverage focusing on procedural aspects rather than personal narratives.

Comparing stories

The Israeli human rights group B'Tselem reported in September 2024 that the Israel Prison Service (IPS) was holding 226 Palestinian minors – some as young as 14 – in detention or in prison on what Israel defined as 'security' grounds. At that time, the IPS was also holding 93 Palestinian minors for being in Israel illegally.[356] In 2020, a Save the Children report revealed how the children were stripped, beaten and blindfolded.[357] The main alleged crime for these detentions is stone throwing, which can carry a 20-year sentence in prison for Palestinian children.'[358]

BBC coverage during our analysis period has not reflected this reality. This is exemplified in its description of Palestinian minors. When there was an exchange of Israelis and Palestinians between 23-28 November 2023, a BBC report described how '50 Israeli hostages – women and children – are to be freed by Hamas over four days, in exchange for 150 Palestinian prisoners.' In describing the Palestinian releases, the article states: 'Most of the 39 Palestinians released by Israel on Friday - 24 women and 15 teenage boys - were in pre-trial detention.'[359] Note here the use of the words Israeli 'children' versus Palestinian 'teenage boys'. Amongst the Israeli children named is Noam and Alma Or, aged 17 and 13 respectively. None of the Palestinian children are named.

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354 See Appendix 2: LLM Classification Methodology #16

355 Israel's escalating use of torture against Palestinians in custody a preventable crime against humanity: UN experts, United Nations Human Rights Office, 5 August 2024, https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/08/israels-escalating-use-torture-against-palestinians-custody-preventable

356 Statistics on Palestinian minors in Israeli custody, B'tselem, September 2024 https://www.btselem.org/statistics/minors_in_custody

357 Defenceless: The Impact of Israeli Military Detention on Palestinian Children, 2020 https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/document/defenceless-impact-israeli-military-detention-palestinian-children/

358 Stripped, beaten and blindfolded: new research reveals ongoing violence and abuse of Palestinian children detained by Israeli military, 10 July 2023, https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/news/media-centre/press-releases/2023/stripped-beaten-and-blindfolded-new-research-reveals-ongoing-violence-and-abuse-of-palestinian-children-detained-by-israeli-military

359 More hostages released by Hamas despite agonising delay, BBC News, 26 November https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-67531477

Other outlets published a detailed list of the minors in November 2023.[360] For this BBC article, readers were presented with three adult Palestinians: citing the alleged crimes of two of them while the third, Sarah al-Suwaisi, is quoted as saying: 'only Hamas helped us'. As an important sidenote: the BBC had to amend the translation from Al-Suwaisi's interview because the subtitles falsely stated that she said: 'No one helped us. Only Hamas cared...We love them very much.' The error has been corrected to: 'Only Hamas felt our sufferings'.[361]

BBC NEWS

Released Palestinian describes Israeli detention as 'humiliating'

Sarah Al-Suwaisa was one of the 39 Palestinian prisoners released by Israel in the first exchange for hostages on Friday.

Speaking after her release, she said she felt "humiliated" by her time in jail, and that pepper spray was used against detainees.

She alleged they were locked in dark rooms, saying "they suffered from the cold". "Only Hamas felt our sufferings," she added.

Clarification: The video below, posted on Saturday at 14:48 GMT, originally carried inaccurate subtitles due to an error in the editing process. It has now been updated to a longer version.

We know that the BBC can acknowledge Palestinian minors for what they are. For example, on 23 November 2023, it stated that women and children were held in Israeli prisons.[362] It also ran some profiles of these children, such as Ahmed Salayme, charged with throwing stones[363], and Mohammad dar-Darwish, 17, charged with throwing a petrol bomb, which he denies.[364]

360 Who are the Palestinian prisoners Israel released on Friday?, Al Jazeera, 24 November 2023, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/24/who-were-the-palestinian-prisoners-israel-released-on-friday

361 Released Palestinian describes Israeli detention as 'humiliating'', BBC News, 27 November 2023, 0250 GMT, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/live/world-middle-east-67527098?post=asset%3A2e8cf02f-6ffe-478b-bfa4-93152d15908b#post

362 Allow more aid into Gaza, Lord Cameron urges Benjamin Netanyahu in Israel, BBC News, 23 November 2023, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-67508560

363 Boy, 14, and freelance reporter among Palestinians freed, BBC News 28 November 2023, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-67561603

364 Palestinian teenager 'dizzy with happiness' to be freed, BBC News, 26 November 2023, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-67536721

BBC NEWS

Boy, 14, and freelance reporter among Palestinians freed

28 November 2023

Israel-Gaza war

GETTY IMAGES

Ahmed Salayme, a Palestinian former prisoner released from an Israeli jail, hugged his mother upon his arrival at home on 28 November

No articles reference Palestinians being held without charge by Israel as 'political prisoners', 'hostages' or 'captives'.[365] There were occasional examples where Palestinians were afforded comparable dignity to Israelis: a handful of articles avoided the prisoner label for Palestinians, stating instead 'Palestinians held in Israeli jails'.[366]

Soon after 7 October, the BBC established and maintained a detailed web page titled 'Stories of the people taken from Israel', profiling the Israeli hostages.[367]

In November 2023, we tracked how BBC News referenced 'teenage boys' a total of 26 times on its TV broadcasts when talking about Palestinian children being released, pointing to a pattern where attributing the term 'children' is actively avoided.[368] When Palestinian sources raised the issue of detainees, presenters frequently challenged them with Israeli security justifications. In contrast, discussions of Israeli hostages rarely included context about Palestinian detainees and political prisoners held without charge or the systemic abuse and torture recorded by international human rights organisations.

365 Derived through a manual search of our LLM dataset.

366 Qatar 'appalled' by reported criticism from Israel's Netanyahu, BBC News, 25 January 2024, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-68091659

367 Hamas hostages: Stories of the people taken from Israel, BBC News, 20 January 2025, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-67053011

368 Centre for Media Monitoring, X, 24 November 2023, https://x.com/cfmmuk/status/1727995569904255010

Humanising Israelis but not Palestinians during the 2025 ceasefire exchange

At the end of January 2025, UNICEF issued a statement welcoming the release of '12 children as young as 15 years old from detention in Israel, as well as young adults who were first detained as children. UNICEF has called to end the detention of children in all its forms.'[369] This was not covered by the BBC.

Palestinian Israeli Detainee Exchange: 19-20 January 2025

- **During 19-20 January exchange, 10 articles were published with 7 focusing on Israeli hostages and only 2 on Palestinian prisoners**
- **BBC broadcasts used emotional language for Israeli hostages, featuring 'heartwarming reunions' and naming individuals**
- **Palestinian prisoners were mentioned only briefly, with no Palestinians named or humanised despite 90 being freed compared to just 3 Israelis**

We monitored BBC coverage during the first 2025 detainee exchange on 19-20 January. The BBC's blindsight is reflected in correspondent Yollande Knell's reluctance to recognise the minors or children released: 'Most of them women. Some teenage boys as well'.[370] Yet on the same day, UNICEF chief Catherine Russell welcomed 'the release of 9 Palestinian children who were reunited with their families overnight in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, after being held in detention for over a year.'[371]

Ten articles were published during these 24 hours of the first Israeli-Palestinian exchanges in January 2025. Seven articles focused on Israeli hostages compared to two articles about Palestinian detainees, with the tenth piece focusing on neither side.[372] Israeli hostages received humanising, emotionally engaging coverage with detailed individual stories. They included: a story headlined '"I came back to life," says freed British-Israeli hostage'[373] and 'Who are the three Israeli hostages released by Hamas?'.[374]

369 Scaling up supplies and services for children in the Gaza Strip: UNICEF, 27 January 2025 https://www.unicef.org.uk/press-releases/scaling-up-supplies-and-services-for-children-in-the-gaza-strip-unicef

370 BBC Breakfast, 20 January 2025, 06:06. The same correspondent has used this phrase repeatedly, for example in the initial exchanges in November 2023: BBC News channel, 23 November 2023, 09:10

371 Catherine Russell, X.com, https://x.com/unicefchief/status/1881407286448439421

372 Identified via a review of BBC articles during this period.

373 'I came back to life' says freed British-Israeli hostage, BBC News, 20 January 2025, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c9w58k9dy7yo

374 Who are the three Israeli hostages released by Hamas?, BBC News, 19 January 2025, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cg5ydgeqrvqo

Comparable profiles were absent with regards to the released Palestinians. Palestinian detainees were largely presented as a collective group, with coverage focusing on procedural aspects rather than personal narratives. This included a video: 'Moment freed Palestinian prisoners reunite with family and friend',[375] and a factual article about the releases of Palestinians.[376]

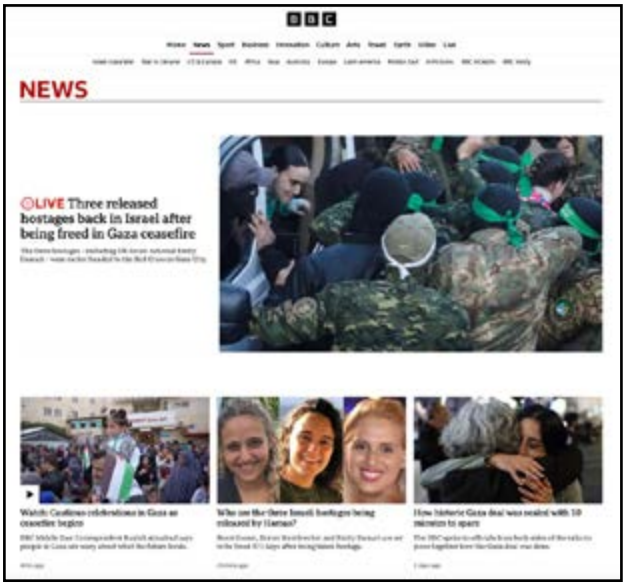
375 Moment freed Palestinian prisoners reunite with family and friends, BBC News article video, 20 June, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/videos/c9w58jzg4x5o

376 Palestinians in West Bank wait anxiously for prisoners to be released, BBC News, 19 January 2025, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cwy7d0dnq5eo

By the evening of 20 January, the BBC belatedly published an interview with Bushra al-Tawil, a freed Palestinian journalist.[377] al-Tawil is described as a 'prisoner', even though the article acknowledges that al-Tawil was 'never charged at all' in her five-year captivity. It included the Israeli position which argues that "it often cannot release details of the charges people face, not even to the detainees and their lawyers, for security reasons, to avoid revealing the identities of informants.'[378]

The BBC's broadcast coverage at this time also showed significant contrast in how the releases were presented. The 20:00 news bulletin on the BBC News channel on 19 January used emotional language for Israeli hostages, featuring 'heartwarming reunions' and naming Emily Damari with details of her family reunion. Palestinian detainees were mentioned only briefly.[379] The following morning's BBC Breakfast led with a purely factual statement about Palestinian releases before quickly returning to Israeli hostages. Unlike the Israeli coverage, no Palestinians were named or humanised, despite 90 being freed compared to just three Israelis.[380] The disparity in language highlights a tendency to dehumanise Palestinian detainees.[381]

Finally, **the imbalance is reflected on the homepages of the BBC News website:**



For a brief moment – during the next round of releases on 1 February – in its broadcast output, the BBC described Palestinians detained as 'hostages', only to quickly[382] and very publicly[383] retract that line.

377 Palestine: Journalist Bushra Al-Taweel Jailed For The Fourth Time Over Two Years, The Coalition for Women in Journalism, 22 March 2022, https://www.womeninjournalism.org/threats-all/palestine-journalist-bushra-al-taweel-jailed-for-the-fourth-time-over-two-years

378 'The hostages meant I got out': Freed Palestinian prisoner welcomes Gaza deal, BBC News, 20 January, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cp9x1yvmm0no

379 BBC News, 19 January 2025, 20:00

380 BBC Breakfast, 07:00, 20 January 2025

381 This was derived through live monitoring of broadcasts backed by transcript references through the Critical Mention monitoring service.

382 Corrections and Clarifications, 4 February 2025 https://www.bbc.co.uk/helpandfeedback/corrections_clarifications/

383 BBC apologises for calling Hamas hostages prisoners, Telegraph, 1 February 2025 https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2025/02/01/bbc-apologises-after-calling-hamas-hostages-prisoners/

The BBC's disparity in its coverage of forcibly detained Israelis and Palestinians was evident during broadcasts on 8 February 2025. The BBC News Channel anchor used the dominant pro-Israeli framing of her narratives and interviews.

Samantha Simmonds repeatedly (and rightly) humanised Israeli captives with emotive language. Yet, Palestinians in Israeli custody were contextualised through their alleged crimes. When describing Israelis, she spoke of 'murder' and personal trauma: 'His British-born wife Leanne and their two daughters Noya and Yahel were murdered in those attacks.' In contrast, when discussing Palestinians being released, the presenter immediately pivoted to how Israelis might feel: 'Joyous scenes for many in the West Bank and Gaza and, as we were saying, difficult ones for many in Israel who see the release of, in some cases, people who've killed their loved ones.'

When speaking to Mustafa Barghouti, a member of the Palestinian Legislative Council and co-founder of the Palestinian National Initiative, she asserted: 'And as we know of the 183 prisoners who are being released today, 18 are serving life sentences for deadly attacks on Israelis.' When Barghouti attempted to challenge this assertion and provide balance, saying 'you're being unfortunately unbalanced again when you say deadly attacks... examine the number of Palestinians killed and the number of Israelis killed,' Simmonds immediately interrupted: 'I appreciate your comments, but these are facts and it would be good to get into the conversation about where you want peace to come from.'[384] This framing presented Israeli judicial verdicts as uncontested facts while dismissing Palestinian perspectives as mere opinion.

Gaza hostage release
Eli Sharabi, 52, from Kibbutz Beeri
Kidnapped with his brother Yossi
Wife and two daughters killed in Oct 7 attack
BBC NEWS BREAKING
Three more Israeli hostages released by Hamas
• Woman stuck for 18 months on an NHS ward in Northampton evicted
12:11

384 BBC News channel, 8 February 2025, between 12:12-12:20

Differing language was used when it came to describing the conditions of released Israelis and Palestinians. On 8 February 2025, released Israelis were emotively described as 'gaunt and sunken-eyed'. The appearances of Palestinian detainees released are not described with the same emotive language, despite seven of them needing hospital treatment following their imprisonment.[385] The article does acknowledge the Red Cross' concern about the conditions surrounding release operations from both sides and later acknowledges the treatment of Palestinians released, but again with none of the emotion reserved for the Israelis released.[386]

The following weeks, and perhaps in revenge for the staged Hamas events to release Israeli prisoners, the Israeli Prison Service released images of soon-to-be released Palestinians forced to wear t-shirts with propaganda messages 'We will not forget or forgive'.[387] The BBC failed to report either the action itself or the outcry[388] against it.

During this period of hostage/detainee exchanges in 2025, we rarely heard of the treatment of Palestinians in Israeli jails, or even a back reference to B'Tselem's coverage of Israeli abuse from May 2024. Nor were there references or names of Palestinians killed in Israeli custody. A stark example is the case of Dr Adnan Al-Bursh outlined below.

385 Seven Palestinians released by Israel admitted to hospital, Al Jazeera, 8 February 2025, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/2/8/seven-palestinians-freed-by-israel-admitted-to-hospital

386 What will anger at sight of gaunt hostages mean for a fragile ceasefire? BBC News, 8 February 2025 https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/clyz7124dppo

387 Times of Israel, 15 February 2025 https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/israel-dresses-freed-prisoners-in-star-of-david-shirts-writing-we-will-not-forget-or-forgive/

388 Palestinian Prisoners Club protests 'threatening phrases' on shirts of inmates freed by Israel, Times of Israel, 15 February 2025 https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/palestinian-prisoners-club-protests-threatening-phrases-on-shirts-of-inmates-freed-by-israel/

‘Administrative detention’

As of September 2024, the Israeli Prison Service was holding 242 Palestinian minors on ‘security’ grounds and 85 under ‘administrative detention’[389]

Of the 240 articles about Palestinian prisoners, there were only six pieces that referenced the term ‘administrative detention’ and explained what this meant.[390] For example, an article entitled ‘How Israel jails hundreds of Palestinians without charge’, describes administrative detention as a ‘longstanding security policy, inherited from the British, that allows the Israeli state to imprison people indefinitely without charge, and without presenting any evidence against them.[391]

Case Study: Comparing two victims

The BBC has covered allegations of torture and mistreatment of Palestinians by Israeli authorities. Examples include:

- An exposé of Israeli soldiers having Palestinians stripped and filmed.[392]

BBC NEWS

Gazans ‘shackled and blindfolded’ at Israel hospital

Sufian Abu Saish said he was severely beaten while in Israeli detention and was denied treatment for a minor wound on his foot.

389 Statistics on Palestinians in Israeli custody, B'Tselem https://www.btselem.org/statistics/minors_in_custody

390 Identified through a keyword search of the dataset.

391 ‘How Israel jails hundreds of Palestinians without charge’, BBC News, 15 December 2023 https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-67600015

392 Israel to act on soldier misconduct after BBC investigation, 12 February 2024, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-68249962

- In August 2024, it covered the B'Tselem report on Israeli abuse of Palestinian prisoners, with the lengthy online article reporting on 'overcrowded, filthy' prisons where the UN found that 17 Palestinians died in custody between October 2023 and May 2024 and where many Palestinians 'were later released without charge'.[393]

BBC NEWS

Blindfolded, bound and beaten: Palestinians tell of Israeli jail abuse

- Similarly, a BBC article from 21 May 2024 reported on Israeli whistleblowers revealing abuse of Palestinians in Israeli prisons, acknowledging that 'Many Gazans detained by Israel's army are released without charge after interrogation.'[394]

BBC NEWS

Israeli soldier videos from Gaza could breach international law, experts say

BBC VERIFY

393 Blindfolded, bound and beaten: Palestinians tell of Israeli jail abuse, 5 August 2024 https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cx2yylgze4ro
394 Gazans 'shackled and blindfolded' at Israel hospital, BBC News, 21 May 2024 https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/crgygdr7vezo

The previous month, the BBC specifically covered Palestinian deaths in prisons.[395]

These reports, while praiseworthy as spot coverage, do not provide any context or framing around Palestinian captives. This is all too apparent during reporting of the release of Palestinians and Israelis in 2025. The discrepancy in how stories are reported can be seen in a case study of two prominent victims.

Hersh Goldberg-Polin

Hersh Goldberg-Polin's case received extensive international media coverage, including from the BBC, becoming one of the most prominently featured Israeli hostages following the 7 October 2023 Hamas attack. The 23-year-old American Israeli was abducted from the Re'im music festival after suffering an arm amputation during the attack. His parents' high-profile campaign for his release, which included meetings with world leaders and Pope Francis, kept his story in the headlines throughout his nearly 11-month captivity. On 31 August 2024, his body was recovered from a tunnel in Rafah, with conflicting accounts emerging about the circumstances of his death – Israeli authorities claimed he was executed at close range, while Hamas initially attributed his death to an airstrike.

There were over 20 articles mentioning Goldberg-Polin between 7 October 2023 and 7 October 2024.[396] He was first mentioned on 12 October 2023[397] followed by an interview with his mother, Rachel Goldberg, on 18 October.[398] Rachel Goldberg is interviewed at several points throughout the year. In September 2024 the BBC then reported on Hersh Goldberg-Polin tragic fate, stating how the Israeli authorities claimed he was 'brutally murdered by Hamas'.[399]

395 Bruises and broken ribs – Palestinian deaths in Israeli prisons, BBC News, 23 April https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-68780112
396 Identified through a manual search of our dataset.
397 US and Canada missing and dead in Israel attack: A musician, a soldier, and a father, BBC News, 12 October 2023, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/67081651
398 Mother of hostage: 'What is it that Hamas wants?', BBC News, 18 October, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/world-middle-east-67141825
399 Israel recovers bodies of six Gaza hostages, BBC News, 1 September 2024 https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/ce31ddege9vo

The reporting of Goldberg-Polin's case is an example where the BBC, and the media in general, have rightly and consistently reported on the plight of the kidnapped Israelis. We struggled to find similar consistency, and emotional depth, for the thousands of Palestinians illegally taken by Israeli authorities.

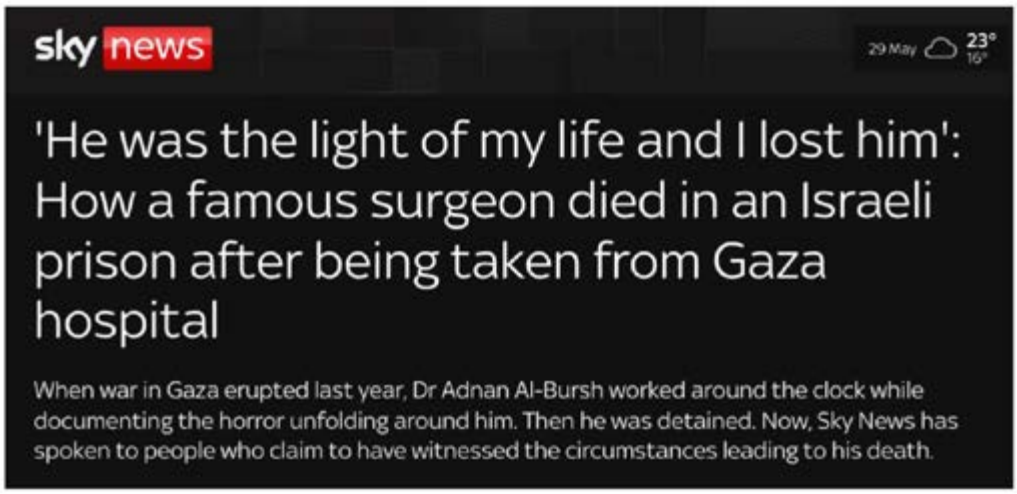
Adnan Al-Bursh

Adnan Al-Bursh, a prominent Palestinian doctor is reported to have been killed in an Israeli prison in 2024. His plight was mentioned three times by the BBC.[400] On 3 May 2024, there was no mention of his murder in the article headline 'Palestinian doctor dies in Israeli prison'.[401]

400 Identified through a manual search of our dataset.
401 Palestinian doctor dies in Israeli prison, BBC News, 3 May 2024 https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cer3740ddj3o

While there are tributes for the doctor from colleagues, the reader is told the Israelis have said he was held 'for national security reasons' and that his death was being 'investigated'. It appears the BBC made no reference to Tlaleng Mofokeng, the UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights, who said on 16 May 'Dr. Adnan's case raises serious concerns that he died following torture at the hands of Israeli authorities.'[402] The word 'torture' did not feature at all in the BBC report on 2 May.

Another BBC article just mentions Al-Bursh's fate in passing: 'reported to have died in prison'. The concerns of torture raised by the UN and other human rights defenders are not featured at all.[403] The UN's concerns are belatedly looked into in an article on a UN Human Rights commission report published later in July.[404] Later that year, Sky News (unlike the BBC) took up the baton, on 18 November 2024[405] with a detailed investigation into the death of Dr. Adnan Al-Bursh and testimonies from fellow detainees. 'Allegations of physical, mental and sexual abuse are rife' the article asserts.


sky news
29 May
23°
16°
'He was the light of my life and I lost him': How a famous surgeon died in an Israeli prison after being taken from Gaza hospital
When war in Gaza erupted last year, Dr Adnan Al-Bursh worked around the clock while documenting the horror unfolding around him. Then he was detained. Now, Sky News has spoken to people who claim to have witnessed the circumstances leading to his death.

402 UN expert horrified by death of Gazan orthopedic surgeon in Israeli detention, United Nations Human Rights Office, 16 May 2024 https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/05/un-expert-horrified-death-gazan-orthopedic-surgeon-israeli-detention

403 Israel releases head of Gaza's al-Shifa hospital after seven months, 1 July 2024 https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cz47w24dld0o

404 Israel may have tortured Palestinian prisoners - UN, BBC News, 31 July 2024 https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cglkvjr7lx0o

405 'He was the light of my life and I lost him': How a famous surgeon died in an Israeli prison after being taken from Gaza hospital, Sky News, 14 November 2024, https://news.sky.com/story/he-was-the-light-of-my-life-and-i-lost-him-how-a-famous-surgeon-died-in-an-israeli-prison-after-being-taken-from-gaza-hospital-13253157

Recommendations

Apply equitable terminology: Use ‘detainees’ or ‘captives’ rather than ‘prisoners’ for Palestinians held without charge or trial, reserving ‘prisoner’ only for those convicted through due process.

Provide proportional context: When reporting on Israeli hostages, consistently include information about the 10,000+ Palestinians held by Israel, including hundreds of children and those held without charge.

Balance coverage of releases: Ensure equal coverage, humanisation and personal storytelling for Palestinian detainees during exchanges, particularly naming and profiling Palestinian children released.

Report detention conditions: Routinely include context from human rights organisations about conditions, alleged torture, and deaths in Israeli detention centres.

Explain administrative detention: Regularly explain Israel’s practice of holding Palestinians without charge or trial for indefinite periods, a practice condemned by international human rights organisations.

Avoid dehumanising language: Refrain from referring to Palestinian children as ‘teenage boys’ when Israeli minors in similar age ranges are described as ‘children’. Be consistent.

Create dedicated profile pages: Just as the BBC maintains a dedicated page profiling Israeli hostages, develop an equivalent resource detailing Palestinian detainees, including their stories and circumstances.

7. KILLING JOURNALISTS AND CENSORSHIP

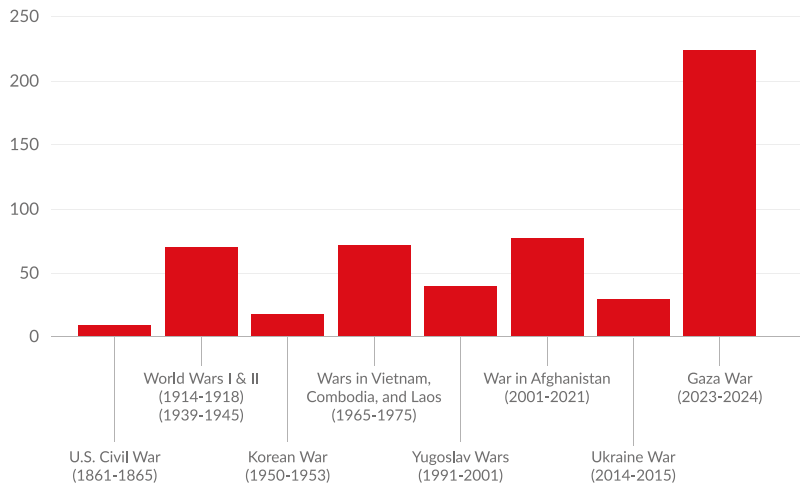
Key Findings

- **Attacks on Palestinian journalists:** The BBC reported the deaths of just **6%** of the 176 journalists killed by the IDF.
- **Comparing attacks on journalists in Ukraine:** Meanwhile, **62%** of the journalists killed in the Russia-Ukraine war (and listed by the Committee to Protect Journalists) were reported by the BBC.
- **Failure to hold Israel accountable for press freedom violations:** The BBC routinely obscures Israeli responsibility for journalist deaths through passive language and fails to fact-check demonstrably false Israeli claims about press freedom, applying weaker scrutiny than it would to similar violations by other nations.

According to the Watson Institute for International Affairs, the war in Gaza has killed more journalists than the U.S. Civil War, World Wars I and II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War (including the conflicts in Cambodia and Laos), the wars in Yugoslavia in the 1990s and 2000s, and the post-9/11 war in Afghanistan, combined. 'It is, quite simply, the worst ever conflict for reporters.'[406]

Graph 12

Number of Journalists and Media Workers Killed, By War



406 News Graveyards: How Dangers to War Reporters Endanger the World, Nick Turse, Costs of War, Watson Institute for International & Public Affairs, Brown University, 1 April 2025, p.2

As of April 2025, at least 170 journalists trying to report from Palestine have been killed by the Israeli authorities.[407] Meanwhile, the Israeli government has censored international media outlets by banning them from entering Gaza. This has been cited by the BBC, but not routinely. Israel ranks 101 in Reporters Without Borders (RSF) Press Freedom Index, well below the Gulf monarchy of Qatar at 84. In giving its ranking, RSF says: 'Since the start of the war in Gaza, launched by Israel on 7 October 2023 following the deadly Hamas attack, more than 100 journalists were killed in six months in Gaza by the Israel Defence Forces, pressure on journalists in Israel increased. Disinformation campaigns and repressive laws have multiplied in Israel.'[408]

Meanwhile, Palestine came in at 157. Its ranking reflects the perilous situation journalists find themselves in: 'Palestine has become the world's most dangerous country for journalists: More than 100 reporters were killed in six months in Gaza by the Israel Defence Forces since 7 October 2023, including 22 in the line of duty. In the West Bank, where journalists were already the victims of abuses by both the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli occupying forces, Israeli pressure has intensified since 7 October, with an increase in arrests of reporters and obstructions to their work.'[409]

The Committee to Protect Journalists concurs, observing in February 2025 that Israel's war on Palestine has killed more journalists over the course of a year than in any other conflict the organisation has documented. 'Palestinian journalists have continued reporting despite killings, injuries, and arbitrary detention at the hands of Israeli forces, none of whom have been held accountable.'[410]

Al-Jazeera journalist Wael Al-Dahdouh whose family has been killed in Israeli attacks.

407 Journalist casualties in the Israel-Gaza war, Committee to Protect Journalists, 22 April 2025, https://cpj.org/2025/02/journalist-casualties-in-the-israel-gaza-conflict/
408 Israel, Reporters Without Borders (RSF) World Press Freedom Index, 2024 https://rsf.org/en/index
409 Palestine, Reporters Without Borders (RSF), World Press Freedom Index, 2024 https://rsf.org/en/index
410 Committee to Protect Journalists, https://cpj.org/full-coverage-israel-gaza-war/

Underreporting the killing of journalists

167 journalists have been killed in Gaza since 7 October 2023, as of February 2025.[411] Out of these, 11 have been reported by the BBC, just 6%.[412] This points to a serious tendency by the BBC to underreport attacks on their fellow journalists in Gaza.

As a comparison, we looked at the CPJ's reporting of the Russia-Ukraine conflict where 16 journalists have been killed in Ukraine since 2022. Cumulatively, the BBC has reported on 10 of these journalists (62%), or 7 (42%) if you exclude non-English articles.

For example, the BBC appears to have missed the killing of Hossam Shabat, an Al-Jazeera journalist described by Reporters Without Borders as one of 'Gaza's best-known journalists'.[413] Interestingly, his killing was covered by the corporation's Latin American service, BBC Mundo.[414] Nor did it cover the death of Zahraa Abu Skheil, who, according to the organisation Women Press Freedom 'was killed alongside her brother and father in an Israeli airstrike while seeking refuge in a school shelter in Gaza City'.[415]

ALJAZEERA
News
Middle East
Explained
Opinion
Sport
Video
Israel-Palestine conflict
'He knew journalism meant Israel would kill him': Mourning Hossam Shabat
Hossam Shabat's mother mourns her son's death, calling him a hero who gave his life to reveal Gaza's horror.

In the few reports where the BBC has profiled killed journalists, it also gives space for Israeli denial, deflection and obfuscation. Take the case of Wael Al-Dahdouh, the Al Jazeera bureau chief whose wife, teenage son, young daughter and grandson were killed in October 2023, followed by the killing of his journalist son Hamza Al-Dahdouh on 7 January 2024. In covering the killing of the family, the article quoted an IDF source claiming that it was 'targeting Hamas in the area where members of Al-Dahdouh's family were killed.' They added: 'When questioned by the BBC about the loss of civilian life in Israeli airstrikes in Gaza, including that of journalists and their families, IDF spokesperson Lt Col Peter Lerner said, "any loss of life is a tragedy".'[416]

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411 Journalist casualties in the Israel-Gaza war, Committee to Protect Journalists, 3 February 2025, https://cpj.org/2025/02/journalist-casualties-in-the-israel-gaza-conflict/

412 Desk research involving compilation of list from the Committee to Protect Journalists, searching through Perplexity.ai and validating through a manual search.

413 Gaza: RSF condemns targeted Israeli strike that killed Al-Jazeera correspondent Hossam Shabat, Reporters Without Borders (RSF), 25 March 2025, https://rsf.org/en/gaza-rsf-condemns-targeted-israeli-strike-killed-al-jazeera-correspondent-hossam-shabat

414 "Si lees esto es porque me mataron": Hossam Shabat, el periodista palestino que fue blanco de un ataque israelí y dejó un mensaje para ser publicado después de su muerte, BBC Mundo, 26 March 2025, https://www.bbc.com/mundo/articles/cvg1203d02go

415 Gaza: WPF Condemns the Killing of Palestinian Journalist Zahra Abu Sakheil in Israeli Airstrike, 9 November 2024, https://www.womeninjournalism.org/alerts/gaza-wpf-condemns-the-killing-of-palestinian-journalist-zahra-abu-sakheil-in-israeli-airstrike

416 Wael Al-Dahdouh: Al Jazeera reporter's family killed in Gaza strike, BBC News, 26 October 2023, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-67225204

Not scrutinising the killers of journalists

The same space for Israeli denial was given for the January 2024 report into the killing of Wael Al-Dahdouh's son, Hamza. Quoting an IDF source: "We are aware of the reports that during the strike, two other suspects who were in the same vehicle as the terrorist were also hit." The article also quotes Israeli spokesperson Mark Regev who makes the claim: "To say Israel deliberately targets the press is ridiculous, we're the only country that actually enshrines the free press."[417]

In another piece, this time reporting on the killing of another Al Jazeera journalist, Ismail al-Ghoul, the Israeli authorities went all out in their justification which the article gave space to: 'In a statement on Thursday, the Israel Defence Forces described Ismail al-Ghoul as a "Hamas military wing operative and Nukhba terrorist".' This BBC report is framed around Al Jazeera's rejection of Israel's claim, but it is noteworthy that Israel's usual strategy of denial is posited in this way.[418]

Laudably, all these articles do find space – normally at the end of the piece – to insert a throwaway line to cite the latest death toll for Palestinian journalists in Gaza at the time, referencing the Committee to Protect Journalists. Whilst the BBC finds space for spokespersons such as Mark Regev to claim that 'Israel does not deliberately target journalists', it does not say, beyond the limited challenge from the Committee to Protect Journalists, that it has been a longstanding policy for journalists to be attacked by Israel's security forces.

On some occasions, the BBC goes to extraordinary lengths to absolve the Israelis of these deaths completely: suggesting the victims were killed accidently. In a live interview on 16 October 2023 with Jonathan Dagher of Reporters without Borders, the interviewer asks: 'How difficult it made people's jobs, this fear of being targeted inadvertently?'[419]

The most infamous case of journalists killed by Israelis is that of Al Jazeera journalist, Shireen Abu Akleh. The Israeli authorities first denied culpability for her killing until it was proved otherwise. Despite the significance of this precedent, the BBC's online coverage referenced Shireen Abu Akleh only once since 7 October 2023, in an article reporting a call to investigate the killing of US citizens in Palestine.[420]

417 Al Jazeera bureau chief's son Hamza al-Dahdouh among journalists killed in Gaza, BBC News, 8 January 2024, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-67905566

418 Al Jazeera rebuffs Israeli claim killed journalist was Hamas operative, BBC News, 2 August 2024, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c1rwr8lj9jro

419 BBC News, 16 October 2023, 14:22

420 Dissenting officials demand probe of Americans killed in West Bank, Gaza, BBC News, 2 November 2024, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/ckgv03x040xo

Recommendations

Be a standard bearer for journalists and journalism: Just as the BBC would stand up for media workers in other parts of the world, regularly report the killing of journalists as a press freedom issue.

Signpost Israeli crackdown on press freedom: Make clear to audiences that Israel is the actor censoring journalists by blocking access and ensure their claims and counterclaims are verified.

8. TWO TIER REPORTING: UKRAINE AND GAZA

Key Findings

- **Unequal conflict reporting standards**: In articles covering attacks and humanitarian conditions, the BBC privileged Israeli narratives (**16.4%** of coverage) **more than twice** as much as Russian perspectives (**7.2%**), while Ukrainian narratives received higher coverage (**40.7%**) than Palestinian (**32.9%**) narratives.
- **Selective justification of military actions:** In articles covering military attacks or humanitarian suffering in Gaza, the BBC provided rationale for Israeli military actions in **75%** of articles, compared to **17%** for Russian actions in Ukraine. The BBC challenged these Israeli justifications in only **41%** of cases, compared to **55%** for Russians.
- **Asymmetric reporting of war crimes**: The BBC discussed war crimes in Ukraine almost **2.6x** as much as in Gaza, mentioning Russia as the perpetrator **2.7x** as often as it mentioned Israel as the perpetrator.
- **Sympathy for Ukrainians:** When looking at articles reporting on **military attacks or humanitarian impact** in Gaza, the BBC published almost **twice as many** articles showing sympathy (emotive language, humanising details, or personal stories about victims) for Ukrainian victims compared to Palestinians.
- **Coverage disparity**: There are twice the number of articles relating to Ukraine vs Gaza – approximately **10** articles per day for Gaza and **20** per day for Ukraine.

In this section, we compare the BBC's coverage of Russia and Israel as both are seen as the dominant powers in their respective conflicts, capable of inflicting significant civilian damage. Russia is widely regarded as the aggressor in Ukraine, with its military actions causing substantial humanitarian crises and violations of international law.[421] Similarly, Israel's military operations in Gaza have been criticised for causing extensive destruction of civilian infrastructure and for violating international humanitarian law, leading to severe humanitarian consequences.[422] Both countries are subject to greater obligations under international law due to them being occupying powers.[423] While the two conflicts are by no means a perfect parallel, one would expect some similar patterns of reporting, editorial choices and due impartiality, as well as similarities in how military operations, attributions and reporting of victims are conveyed.

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421 Documented, for example by Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), https://www.ohchr.org/en/countries/ukraine

422 Israel's assault on the foundations of international law must have consequences: UN experts, 30 December 2024 https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/12/israels-assault-foundations-international-law-must-have-consequences-un

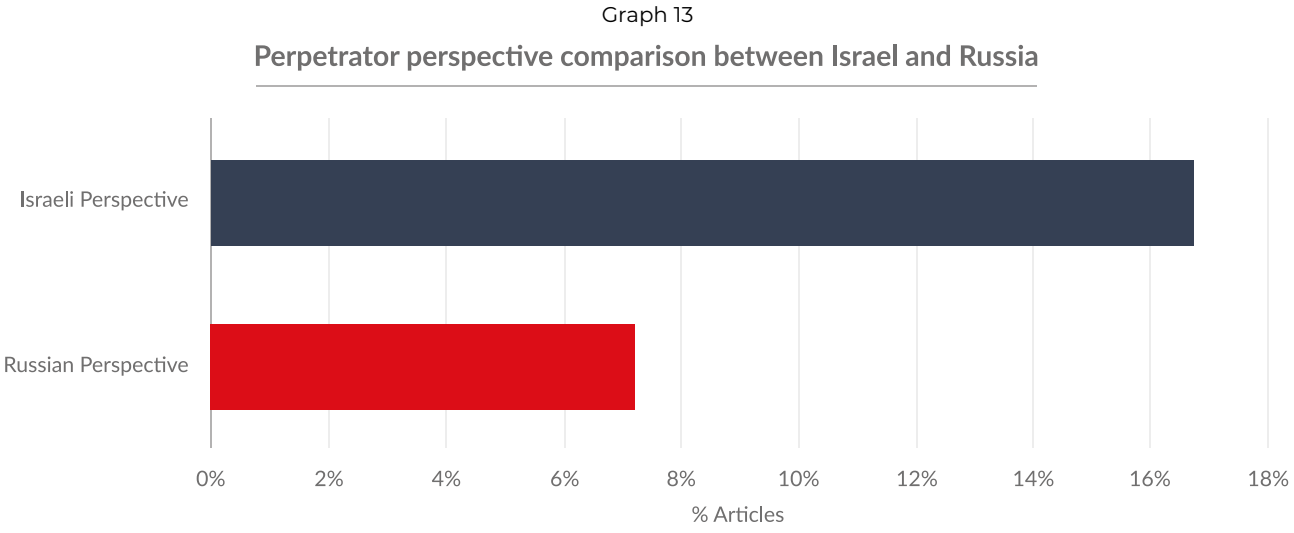
423 Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol 1), https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/protocol-additional-geneva-conventions-12-august-1949-and

The BBC's coverage of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and Israel's war on Gaza reveals distinct patterns of how each conflict is framed and reported. Through analysis of headlines and coverage choices, clear differences emerge in language, attribution, and framing between the two conflicts. Through our analysis, we evaluate BBC articles spanning from 7 October 2023 to 7 October 2024 relating to the Israel-Palestine war, and from 24 February 2022 (when Russia commenced its invasion) to 24 February 2023. We also go beyond the dataset to reflect the continuation of those patterns.

There were twice the number of English language articles relating to Ukraine vs Gaza: approximately 10 articles per day for Gaza between 7 October 2023 and 2 October 2024, compared to 20 per day for Ukraine between 24 February 2022 and 24 February 2023.[424]

Our findings indicate that Israeli perspectives receive twice as much coverage as Russian perspectives in comparable timeframes (16.4% vs. 7.2%), while Ukrainian narratives received higher coverage (40.7%) than Palestinian (32.9%) narratives.[425]

Graph 13

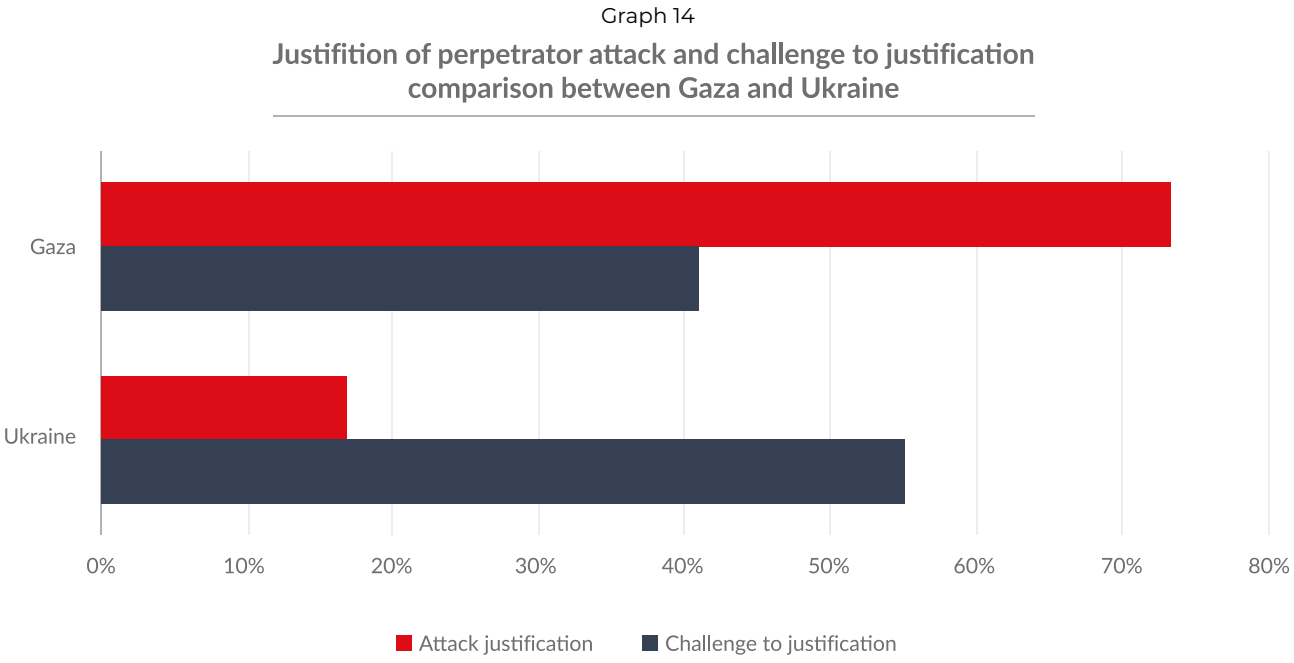


424 This is based on the parameters of our dataset. Thecore methodology explains the parameters and composition of the dataset.
425 See Appendix 2: LLM Classification Methodology #17

Double standards: Israeli actions justified, Russian actions condemned

Our analysis shows a striking pattern in how military actions are contextualised. **When reporting on attacks or humanitarian conditions in Gaza, the BBC provides a rationale for military actions in 75% of cases, compared to just 17% for Russian military actions in Ukraine.**[426] More concerning is that when rationale is provided for Israeli actions, it is challenged in only 41% of instances, whereas Russian justifications face challenge 55% of the time.[427]

Graph 14



As we have shown elsewhere in the report, the coverage of Palestine often employs more passive construction and less direct attribution. When reporting on bombardments of Gaza, headlines tend to focus on the impact rather than the perpetrator.

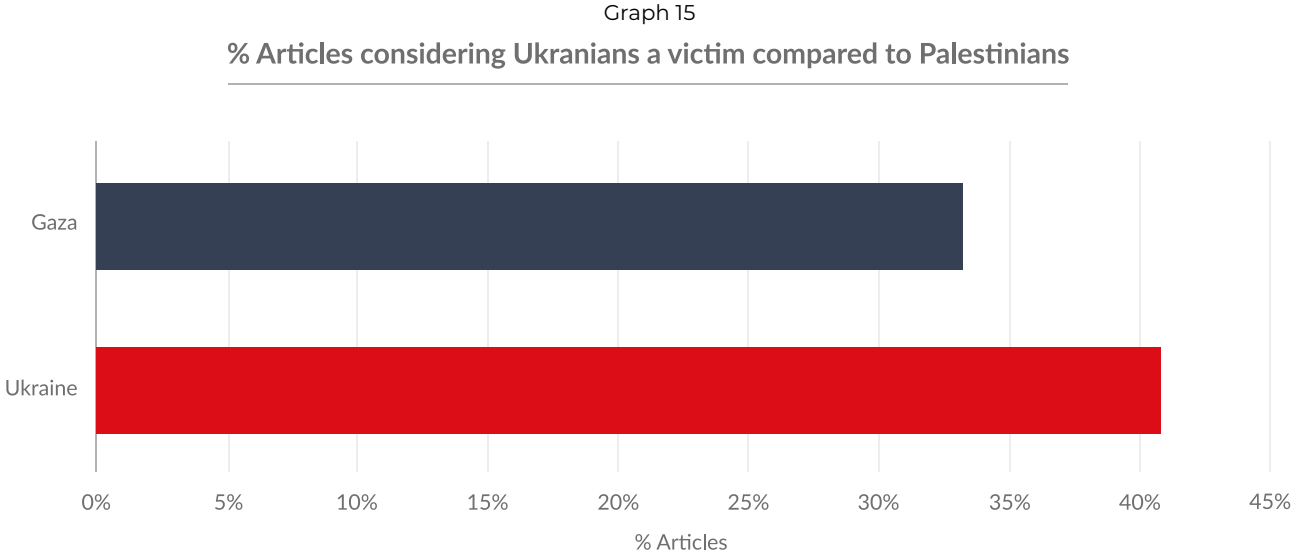
426 See Appendix 2: LLM Classification Methodology #18
427 See Appendix 2: LLM Classification Methodology #19

Humanised vs. anonymised: A tale of two types of victims

When looking at articles reporting on military attacks or humanitarian impact in Gaza, **the BBC published almost twice as many articles showing sympathy for Ukrainian victims compared to Palestinians.**

Our Large Language Model classifier identifies Victim Sympathy as emotive language, personalised details, humanising elements, or emotional context, versus Minimal when using clinical, detached, neutral descriptions. This analysis was done on all articles within the dataset describing attacks or humanitarian conditions in Gaza and Ukraine.[428]

Graph 15



The treatment of casualty figures in BBC headlines reveals a distinct pattern in how the victims and perpetrators are attributed across the two conflicts. When looking at articles reporting on military attacks or humanitarian impact in Gaza, the BBC published almost twice as many articles showing sympathy for Ukrainian victims versus Palestinians.

The Ukraine coverage is best exemplified by this headline: 'In a split second, Russia wipes out three generations of a Ukrainian family'.[429] As we made clear in the first section of our report, we found no such BBC headlines for the countless more generations of Palestinians wiped out through Israel's attacks. Outlets such as the Associated Press[430] and Le Monde[431] have had, on the other hand, no such difficulty in covering Israel's attacks in this way.

428 See Appendix 2: LLM Classification Methodology #20

429 In a split second, Russia wipes out three generations of a Ukrainian family', BBC News, 28 January 2025 https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cwyp8nkgxj3o

430 The war in Gaza has wiped out entire Palestinian families. AP documents 60 who lost dozens or more, Associated Press, 17 June 2024, https://www.ap.org/news-highlights/spotlights/2024/the-war-in-gaza-has-wiped-out-entire-palestinian-families-ap-documents-60-who-lost-dozens-or-more/

431 In the Gaza Strip, four generations wiped out in seconds, Le Monde, 13 October 2024, https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2024/10/11/in-the-gaza-strip-four-generations-wiped-out-in-seconds_6729106_4.html

BBC NEWS

In a split second, Russia wipes out three generations of a Ukrainian family

YULIIA TARASEVYCH

Sophila Buhayova, 27, Adam Buhayov, 17 months, and Tetiana Tarasevych, 68, were all killed in a Russian bombing attack in Zaporizhzhia

When casualties are reported with certainty, they are typically presented as direct fact: 'Ukraine war: Shelling kills six in eastern town',[432] 'Ukraine war: Russia railway station strike kills 25, injures dozens'.[433] When qualifiers do appear in Ukraine headlines, they tend to be used only for uncertain numbers ('Scores feared dead after Russia attack on Mykolaiv barracks'[434]) or are attributed to official Ukrainian services ('Russian missile strikes kill 18 in Odessa region - emergency service'[435]).

BBC NEWS

Ukraine war: Six die in shelling as new assault looms

18 July 2022

DSNS.GOV.UA

Rescuers dug in the rubble in search of victims

BBC NEWS

Ukraine war: Russia railway station strike kills 25, injures dozens

25 August 2022

REUTERS

A residential house was also destroyed in strikes on Chaplyne

432 Ukraine war: Shelling kills six in eastern town, 18 July 2022 https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-62207922
433 Ukraine war: Russia railway station strike kills 25, injures dozens, 25 August 2022 https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-62666188
434 Scores feared dead after Russia attack on Mykolaiv barracks, 19 March 2022 https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-60807636
435 Russian missile strikes kill 18 in Odessa region - emergency service, 1 July 2022 https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-62006743

In contrast, Gaza casualty figures are consistently qualified with attribution to the 'Hamas-run health ministry', even when reporting specific numbers: 'Hamas-run health ministry says Gaza death toll passes 10,000'[436], 'Gaza strikes: Hamas-run health ministry says 700 killed in 24 hours'[437]. As we examined earlier in the report, the phrase 'Hamas-run' appears as a regular prefix to health ministry figures, suggesting an editorial position requiring specific attribution and potentially questioning of their reliability.

The portrayal of civilian casualties reveals another striking contrast between the coverage of the two conflicts. In Ukraine, the BBC's headlines often focus on individual stories and personal narratives, bringing home the human cost of the war. The death of 'Four-year-old Liza killed by Russian attack on Vinnytsia'[438] received prominent coverage, as did the loss of cultural figures like the 'Ukrainian ballet star Artem Datsyshyn dies after Russian shelling'.[439] Even when reporting on elderly victims, the coverage maintained this personal touch, as seen in 'Holocaust survivor killed by Russian shelling in Kharkiv'.[440]

436 Hamas-run health ministry says Gaza death toll passes 10,000, BBC News, 6 November 2023 https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-67332684

437 Gaza strikes: Hamas-run health ministry says 700 killed in 24 hours, BBC News, 24 October 2023 https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-67204951

438 Ukraine war: Four-year-old Liza killed by Russian attack on Vinnytsia, 15 July 2022 https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-62181726

439 Ukrainian ballet star Artem Datsyshyn dies after Russian shelling, 18 March 2022, https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-60794419

440 Ukraine war: Holocaust survivor killed by Russian shelling in Kharkiv, 21 March 2022, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-60826303

For the BBC's Gaza coverage, far fewer headlines named Palestinian victims. There were some exceptions, such as 'Awni Eldous: The Palestinian boy who found YouTube fame after death',[441] 'Wael Al-Dahdouh: Al Jazeera reporter's family killed in Gaza strike',[442] and 'Refaat Alareer: UCL urged to issue statement on ex-student's death'.[443] Even so, more headlines tended to aggregate numbers and institutional impact. Headlines frequently report death tolls without individual stories, as seen in: 'More than 25,000 now killed in Gaza, Hamas-run health ministry says'.[444] The focus often shifts to institutional impact, with headlines like 'Gaza hospitals struggle amid Israeli attacks'[445] and broader effects on displaced populations: 'Displaced among dozens killed in Israeli strikes on southern Gaza'. [446]

In an earlier section of our report, we discussed the case of Hind Rajab and the BBC's controversial reporting of this murder. The BBC's headline for her killing was 'Hind Rajab, 6, found dead in Gaza days after phone calls for help'.[447] Less than a week prior to this story, the BBC reported on an incident in the Ukraine war with the headline: 'Ukraine war: Baby killed in Russian strike on Kharkiv hotel.'[448]

BBC NEWS

Hind Rajab, 6, found dead in Gaza days after phone calls for help

Israel-Gaza war

BBC NEWS

Ukraine war: Baby killed in Russian strike on Kharkiv hotel

War in Ukraine

441 Awni Eldous: The Palestinian boy who found YouTube fame after death, 24 December 2023 https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-67788360

442 Wael Al-Dahdouh: Al Jazeera reporter's family killed in Gaza strike, 26 October 2023, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-67225204

443 Refaat Alareer: UCL urged to issue statement on ex student's death, 13 December 2023, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-67706283

444 More than 25,000 now killed in Gaza, Hamas-run health ministry says, 21 January 2024, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-68050172

445 Gaza hospitals struggle amid Israeli attacks, 29 October 2023, https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-middle-east-67257333

446 Displaced among dozens killed in Israeli strikes on southern Gaza, 17 October 2023, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-67133803

447 Hind Rajab, 6, found dead in Gaza days after phone calls for help, 11 February 2024, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-68261286

448 Ukraine war: Baby killed in Russian strike on Kharkiv hotel, 6 February 2024, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-68214631

Selective Outrage: War crimes in Ukraine highlighted, those in Gaza downplayed

Our analysis reveals that the BBC's coverage includes discussions of war crimes in Ukraine nearly 2.6 times more frequently than in Gaza.[449] Additionally, Russia is identified as the perpetrator of war crimes 2.7 times more often than Israel is named as the perpetrator of similar violations.[450]

The description of military operations reveals significant divergence in coverage patterns. When reporting on Russian actions in Ukraine, the BBC includes third-party accusations of war crimes in its headlines. These include statements from international organisations ('Russia's attack on Mariupol theatre a clear war crime, Amnesty says'[451]) and Ukrainian officials ('Russia guilty of war crimes in Kherson - Zelensky'[452]).

Amnesty's red flag about war crimes committed by Russia was reported in June 2022, less than six months into the conflict. Yet, when Amnesty called for Israel to be 'investigated for war crimes' in December 2023[453] after conducting air strikes, this did not feature in BBC headlines.

What we do find when it comes to Israel is a focus on tactical movements and military objectives, as seen in 'Israeli forces push deeper into north'[454] and 'Israel special forces enter besieged Gaza hospital'.[455] Even when reporting on evacuations, the language remains technical: 'Israel orders evacuation of Khan Younis in southern Gaza'.[456]

As we stated in Section Five examining genocide and war crimes, the BBC is ready to apply the term 'war crime' to its reporting on Ukraine, but reluctant when it comes to Israeli actions in Palestine. For example, in an article on the execution of Ukrainian prisoners, the BBC examines the international law implications and tells us 'International humanitarian law – particularly the Third Geneva Convention, external – offers protection to prisoners of war, and executing them **is a war crime**.'[457]

We struggle to find those observations made for Gaza unless raised by others. Instead, the BBC has defended its studious avoidance to describe Israel's actions for what they are: war crimes. That term was absent in an otherwise praiseworthy BBC Verify revelation of videos showing Israeli soldiers filming and sharing footage of Palestinian detainees who are stripped, bound, blindfolded, and subjected to public exposure. The report cites human rights experts and like the article on Ukraine, observes that 'Article 13 of the Third Geneva Convention states prisoners of war must be protected at all times, particularly against acts of violence or intimidation and against 'insults and public curiosity'. [458]

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449 See Appendix 2: LLM Classification Methodology #14
450 See Appendix 2: LLM Classification Methodology #15
451 Russia's attack on Mariupol theatre a clear war crime, Amnesty says, 30 June 2022, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-61979873
452 Ukraine war: US condemns 'brutal' Russian strikes on Ukraine, 10 October 2022 https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-63208897
453 Israel/OPT: US-made munitions killed 43 civilians in two documented Israeli air strikes in Gaza – new investigation, 5 December 2023, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/12/israel-opt-us-made-munitions-killed-43-civilians-in-two-documented-israeli-air-strikes-in-gaza-new-investigation/
454 Tank seen on key Gaza road as Israeli forces push deeper into north, 30 October 2023, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-67261366
455 Israel special forces enter besieged Gaza hospital, 15 February 2024, https://www.bbc.com/news/live/world-middle-east-68305045
456 Israel orders evacuation Khan Younis in southern Gaza, 18 November 2024, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-67462610
457 Russia is executing more and more Ukrainian prisoners of war, BBC News, 22 December 2024, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c7ve11lr247o
458 Israeli soldier videos from Gaza could breach international law, experts say, BBC News, 9 February 2024, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-68249962

This omission has been picked up by viewers too, for example, in a report on an attack on a hospital in the West Bank where Israelis targeted patients. The complaint – which was rejected – stated that the BBC 'failed to mention that one of the targeted men had been undergoing treatment at the time, thereby diverting attention from what amounted to a war crime in a way which was neither accurate nor impartial.'[459]

Case Study: Trusted source or questionable claims – the BBC's selective trust in human rights reports

The disparity in the BBC's reporting of Ukraine and Gaza extends to its coverage of human rights concerns as well. We compare two articles where the human rights group has accused the stronger party, Russia and Israel, of serious war crimes violations. These cover two reports from the same globally recognised organisation, albeit handled in two very different ways.

When reporting on Amnesty's findings about Russia's attack on the Mariupol theatre in Ukraine,[460] the BBC adopts a definitive tone from the outset, stating unequivocally that the attack 'was a "clear war crime" that killed at least a dozen people.' The report presents Amnesty's findings with minimal qualification and positions Russian denials as implausible, noting that Amnesty's 'investigation found no convincing evidence to support other possible explanations.' Russian official responses are relegated to later paragraphs and presented briefly without elaboration: 'Russia denied it had attacked the theatre, and a statement by the defence ministry claimed the attack had been carried out from within the building, as part of a "false flag" operation.'

In contrast, the BBC's coverage of Amnesty's genocide allegations against Israel employs significantly more cautious language. The headline and opening paragraph use distancing phrases such as 'accuses Israel of genocide' compared to the more definitive statement when reporting on Amnesty's accusation against Russia.

BBC NEWS

Russia's attack on Mariupol theatre a clear war crime, Amnesty says

BBC NEWS

Amnesty accuses Israel of genocide against Palestinians in Gaza

459 BBC News (10pm), BBC One, 30 January 2024, https://www.bbc.co.uk/contact/ecu/bbc-news-10pm-bbc-one-30-january-2024

460 Russia's attack on Mariupol theatre a clear war crime, Amnesty says, BBC News June 2022 https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-61979873

Israeli denials are prominently featured in the third paragraph and given substantial space: 'Israel's foreign ministry described the 295-page report as "entirely false and based on lies", while the Israeli military said the claims were 'entirely baseless and fail to account for the operational realities' it faces.' [461]The article even quotes an Israeli spokesperson describing Amnesty as a 'deplorable and fanatical organisation' – language far more critical than anything attributed to Russian officials in the Ukraine article.

Case Study - A tale of two tragedies: contrasting coverage of two different Palm Sunday attacks

On 13 April 2025, two different attacks took place on Palm Sunday: one at the Christian-run Al-Ahli Hospital in Gaza, the other at the Russian town of Sumy. Both resulted in fatalities and both drew condemnations. The Al-Ahli attack meant that Gaza City's last remaining hospital was effectively shut down, having previously been targeted many times since 7 October 2023.

The BBC published stories covering both attacks, headlined: 'At least 34 people killed in Russian ballistic missile attack on Sumy'[462] and 'Israeli air strike destroys part of last fully functional hospital in Gaza City'[463] – however, the original headline was 'Gaza hospital hit by Israeli strike, Hamas-run health ministry says' [464]

BBC NEWS
At least 34 people killed in Russian ballistic missile attack on Sumy
00:41
Footage shows widespread damage in Sumy missile attacks

461 Amnesty accuses Israel of genocide against Palestinians in Gaza, BBC News, 5 December 2024, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cjwl0v4w5j3o

462 At least 34 people killed in Russian ballistic missile attack on Sumy, BBC News 13 April, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c4g4262x4x1o

463 Israeli air strike destroys part of last fully functional hospital in Gaza City, BBC News, 13 April, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cjr7l123zy5o

464 Assal Rad, X, 13 April 2025, https://x.com/AssalRad/status/1911326824178884934

In the Sumy article, attribution is direct and unequivocal: 'Two Iskander-variant ballistic missiles struck at around 10:15 local time,' and the attack is described in stark, emotive terms — 'bloodied bodies scattered in the streets,' with '20 buildings... including four educational institutions' damaged. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky is quoted calling for a 'tough' international response. The BBC's framing here leaves no ambiguity about responsibility, relying on official Ukrainian sources without caveat.

By contrast, the Gaza article uses more cautious and qualified language. The main source of information is given as 'the territory's Hamas-run health ministry,' and although destruction is vividly described — 'footage showed huge flames and smoke as patients and their relatives fled the hospital' — the BBC includes the Israeli military's justification that the site was 'a command and control centre used by Hamas.'

In broadcast, the contrast is even more stark. By lunchtime (1300) on Palm Sunday, the Sumy attack was the headline news feature on the BBC News channel, followed by the attack on the Al-Ahli hospital, even though an attack on a hospital might be more significant since it could be considered a war crime. The Sumy attack featured a touching live eye-witness interview with a Ukrainian who also highlighted the Christian importance of Palm (Willow) Sunday to the country. There was no official statement of justification from the Russian attackers.

Yet, the following report on the Al-Ahli attack was notable in its lack of live victim reactions from Gaza. Instead — unlike her statement introducing the Russia attack – the presenter was at pains to provide the Israeli justification: 'Israel said that the compound was used by Hamas terrorists to plan and execute terror attacks against Israeli civilians and IDF troops and that steps were taken to mitigate harm to civilians', repeated again in the pre-recorded report filed by the BBC's Jerusalem's correspondent.[465] This framing continued that evening on the BBC's Weekend News programme. The Al-Ahli attack was reported 14 minutes later with a 30 second reference.[466]

465 BBC News channel, 13 April 2025, 13:00-13:20
466 BBC Weekend News, 13 April 2025, 22:00-22:20

Recommendations

Standardise attribution of responsibility: Apply the same direct attribution practices to Israeli attacks that are used for Russian ones (e.g., 'Israeli strike kills 50 at school' rather than '50 killed in strike on school').

Be consistent in identifying war crimes: Discuss alleged Israeli war crimes with the same frequency and directness applied to Russian actions in Ukraine.

Humanise victims equally: Ensure Palestinian civilian casualties receive the same personalised, named coverage given to Ukrainian victims.

Balance justification challenges: Challenge military justifications from all parties with equal rigour, rather than accepting Israeli rationales while questioning Russian ones.

Maintain consistent moral framing: Avoid creating a clear moral framework for one conflict (Russia-Ukraine) while presenting another (Israel-Palestine) as morally.

9. CONCLUSION: THE BBC'S DERELICTION OF DUTY IN REPORTING ISRAEL'S WAR ON GAZA

This report set out to examine how Britain's public service broadcaster, the BBC, has covered Israel's war on Gaza since October 2023. Building on Centre for Media Monitoring's previous analysis of general media coverage in 'Media Bias Gaza 2023-24', we have undertaken a focused investigation of the BBC's output through extensive computational analysis of thousands of articles and broadcast clips, as well as detailed qualitative research examining specific incidents, editorial decisions, and patterns of coverage.

In covering this conflict, our aim was to assess whether the BBC fulfilled its Charter obligations to 'provide impartial news and information to help people understand and engage with the world around them'.[467] This obligation is underpinned in its Editorial Guidelines which states: 'in applying due impartiality to news, we give due weight to events, opinion and the main strands of argument.'[468]

We recognise that the BBC has a tough job in discharging its duties. At the outset of this war, and in response to mounting criticism, the chief of BBC News and Current Affairs, Deborah Turness, affirmed that 'trusted journalism is vital', and that 'at the BBC we hold ourselves to a higher standard.'[469]

In our analysis, those standards have been tested to breaking point. In order to fulfil its obligations in providing 'impartial news and information', we would expect the BBC to report the full facts of such conflicts without fear or favour, and without omitting relevant information or context.

Yet, whether it be the reporting of casualties, the representation of victims, or the context it gives to the events of 7 October 2023, we reveal a pattern where the BBC has not adequately reflected the facts on the ground. The systematic omission of key historical and contemporary context has acquired an institutional quality at the Corporation. Furthermore, we present several data points and case studies that point to the BBC's failure to deliver public interest journalism. Whether this be overlooking the genocidal rhetoric of Israeli leaders – now referenced in war crimes charges against them – or properly scrutinising Israeli claims and denials in the face of ethnic cleansing and other war crimes, the BBC have simply underreported what is now overwhelmingly being seen as a 'live-streamed genocide' and crimes against humanity.

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467 BBC Royal Charter, Article 6(1): Mission, Public Purposes and Functions of the BBC, 2017 https://downloads.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/assets/files/pdf/about/how_we_govern/2016/charter.pdf

468 BBC Editorial Guidelines, Section 4: Impartiality, https://www.bbc.co.uk/editorialguidelines/guidelines/impartiality

469 How the BBC is covering Israel-Gaza, BBC, 25 October 2025 https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/articles/2023/how-bbc-is-covering-israel-gaza

Our Findings

1. For the BBC, Palestinians deaths are less newsworthy

The evidence collected in this study suggest that the BBC finds Palestinian suffering less newsworthy than Israeli suffering, or Israeli violence less shocking and newsworthy than Palestinian violence. Despite Gaza enduring 34x more deaths than Israel since the start of the war, the BBC ran an almost equal number of articles offering personal and humanising stories about specific individuals or families (279 for Palestinians vs. 201 for Israelis). Meanwhile, BBC article headlines mentioned Palestinian casualties just two times more than Israeli casualties. When measured in proportion to the 34:1 Gazan-Israeli death toll, the BBC gave Israeli deaths 33 times more coverage across articles – and 19 times more across TV/radio – than Palestinian deaths. Lastly, the persistent use of the 'Hamas-run' qualifier (appearing 1,155 times in articles) serves little journalistic purpose beyond delegitimising Palestinian casualty figures, despite numerous international bodies (including the UN) deeming these figures reliable.

The BBC may argue – as it did in rejecting a complaint that the broadcaster did not duly reflect Israeli suffering – that 'impartiality is resistant to simple quantification' and that this principle 'does not, for example, require reports on deaths on one side of a conflict to be "balanced" with reference to deaths on another – particularly where the conflict is asymmetric.'[470]

While we would recognise that impartiality should not only be reduced to a mechanical equivalence of figures, that same principle does not justify the *absence* or *minimisation* of figures where they are central to understanding the nature and scale of events. The BBC has not sufficiently quantified or contextualised the scale of Palestinian casualties and suffering, and in doing so, has dehumanised Palestinian lives and distorted public understanding of the conflict's human cost. In an asymmetric conflict – by the BBC's own admission – one side bears a disproportionately higher toll.

In an October 2023 statement, Deborah Turness implicitly repudiated 'both sidesism' by saying criticism from both sides of the divide is not good enough for the BBC or its audiences. We agree. The BBC has a responsibility to inform audiences of humanitarian realities on the ground. This is not about 'balancing' numbers between sides, but about ensuring that the scale of suffering is not selectively nor inconsistently reported. Yet, this is precisely what the BBC has done.

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470 BBC News (10pm), BBC One, 1 December 2023, BBC Executive Complaints Unit, 15 February 2024, https://www.bbc.co.uk/contact/ecu/bbc-news-10pm-bbc-one-1-december-2023

2. The BBC deploys a hierarchy of language for Israelis and Palestinians

The BBC's linguistic analysis reveals systematic dehumanisation of Palestinian suffering through quantifiable language choices. Despite Palestinians suffering 34 times more deaths than Israelis (42,010 vs 1,246), emotive terminology overwhelmingly favoured Israeli victims across all platforms.

BBC presenters and reporters used emotive terms 1,715 times for Israeli victims compared to just 474 times for Palestinians – 3.6 times as many for Israeli vs Palestinians, despite Gazans' suffering the vast majority of the war's civilian casualties. The word 'massacre' was applied to Israeli victims almost five times more frequently than Palestinians, whilst terms like 'butchered', 'butcher', and 'butchering' were used exclusively for Israeli victims by BBC personnel.

The murder/killed distinction proved particularly revealing: 'Murder', 'murdered', 'murderous', and 'murderer/s' were referenced 220 times by BBC presenters and reporters for actions against Israelis but just once for Palestinians. Meanwhile, the more clinical term 'killed' appeared almost equally for both sides (1,167 vs 1,163 in articles) despite the 34:1 casualty ratio, whilst 'died' – a passive construction obscuring responsibility – was used 50 times for Palestinians compared to just 7 times for Israelis. Of 178 adjectives identified, the four most frequently used terms all favoured Israeli victims: 'deadly' (61 for Israelis vs 21 for Palestinians), 'brutal' (23 vs 11), 'barbaric' (18 vs 4), and 'murderous' (20 vs 3). Terms like 'heinous' (5 instances) and 'brutally' (6 instances) were used exclusively for Israeli victims.

The BBC's systematic use of passive language particularly obscures Israeli responsibility for the overwhelming scale of violence. With Israel conducting an estimated 10,728 aerial strikes since 7 October 2023, the BBC published over 150 articles about Israeli attacks without naming the perpetrator in headlines, using passive language like 'Air strike on Gaza school kills at least 15 people' rather than 'Israeli strike on Gaza school kills at least 15 people'. The term 'massacre' appeared in BBC headlines five times during the analysis period – all exclusively applied to attacks on Israelis, despite numerous mass casualty events affecting Palestinians.

These linguistic patterns, whether deliberate editorial policy or unconscious bias, fundamentally betray the BBC's commitment to impartiality by constructing a moral universe where Israeli suffering is inherently more tragic, more deliberate, and more worthy of human empathy than Palestinian deaths. When Palestinian children are described as having simply 'died', Israeli victims are 'brutally murdered'. When Israeli attacks are obscured to become clinical 'strikes', Palestinian attacks are condemned as 'barbaric terrorism'. In short, the BBC abandons objective journalism for a framework that systematically dehumanises one people whilst elevating another. Such pervasive linguistic bias doesn't merely reflect editorial choices but suggests a more profound failure to value all lives as equal.

3. Interviewees with independent or Palestinian perspectives are not treated fairly at the BBC

Palestinian perspectives face significant barriers to being heard on BBC platforms. The BBC interviewed significantly fewer Palestinians (1,085) compared to Israelis (2,350) during our analysis period. Interviewees were pressed to condemn Hamas attacks in 38 separate interviews, while we were unable to find any instances of similar pressure to condemn Israel's actions. In addition, BBC presenters shared the Israeli perspective 11 times more frequently than the Palestinian perspective when interviewing neutral third parties like humanitarian organisations.

And as we have stated earlier, the corporation's consistent shutting down of genocide allegations – occurring in over 100 documented instances – demonstrates the imbalance seemingly baked into BBC interviews. Meanwhile, Israeli representatives are rarely asked to condemn their government's actions despite the far greater death toll in Gaza.

These patterns represent a serious departure from the BBC's stated commitment to impartiality, which requires giving 'due weight to events, opinion and the main strands of argument' across its output.

4. History starts on 7 October 2023 at the BBC

Whilst the attacks of 7 October 2023 which led to the killing of over 1,200 Israelis have rightly been condemned, the context given around the attack has been small, if not non-existent, thereby reinforcing the Israeli government's narrative of self-defence and retribution, which has led to the killing of over 50,000 Palestinians.

The data shows that the BBC has largely failed to provide crucial contemporary and historical context that would help audiences understand the war. The attacks were referenced in at least 40% of the BBC's online coverage. Yet only 0.5% of articles referenced any historical or contemporary context. occupation and oppression preceding the events.

The BBC has also failed to provide sufficient immediate context. For example, it decided not to report on Israeli military strategies such as the Dahiya Doctrine – involving the deliberate targeting of civilian infrastructure – and the Hannibal Directive – which prioritises military action over the safe negotiation and release of hostages – both of which are important in understanding Israeli operations. Beyond our report, several other researchers have pointed to other areas of omission – most notably, the refusal to cover allegations of British military and logistics support for Israel.[471]

The recent BBC documentary by Louis Theroux, The Settlers, is a rare, good example of contemporary and historical context being faithfully reported. Yet, whilst this documentary is part of other instances of excellent context provision by some BBC journalists, these remain exceptions. The systematic pattern of contextual omission raises serious questions about the BBC's adherence to its own editorial guidelines on impartiality. Without proper context, audiences are left with an incomplete understanding of one of the world's most consequential conflicts – precisely what the BBC's public service mandate seeks to prevent.

471 National Scandal, The BBC's Gaza Cover-Up, Declassified, 15 January 2025, https://www.declassifieduk.org/national-scandal-the-bbcs-gaza-cover-up/

5. The BBC suppresses or minimises allegations of genocide

The BBC's approach to allegations of genocide against the Palestinians represents perhaps the most profound and egregious failure in its coverage of the Israel-Gaza conflict. Our research has found a systematic pattern of the BBC suppressing claims about a 'plausible genocide' and failing to properly investigate and report on Israeli actions contributing to these claims.

This institutional resistance to examining genocide claims reveals a four-fold failure:

1. The BBC abdicated its early warning responsibility by failing to adequately report on genocidal intent. Despite clear statements from Israeli officials indicating such intent – including former Defence Minister Gallant's infamous 'human animals' declaration – this rhetoric featured in less than 1% of BBC coverage. Moreover, Netanyahu's charged biblical Amalek reference, widely interpreted as invoking divine command to utterly annihilate an enemy, went entirely unreported despite its citation in South Africa's case at the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

2. In matters of accountability, the BBC has underreported efforts to hold Israel to international legal standards. The corporation downplayed the significance of ICJ proceedings that found a 'plausible risk' to Palestinians' right to be protected from genocide and consistently framed genocide allegations as mere opinion rather than serious legal claims warranting investigation.

3. When documenting potential genocidal actions, the BBC consistently failed to connect patterns of violence or clearly identify perpetrators. We found over 150 articles about Israeli attacks that omitted the perpetrator from headlines, using passive language that obscured responsibility for the killing of over 50,000 Palestinians. Headlines such as 'Air strike on Gaza school kills at least 15 people' are illustrative of how the BBC fails to highlight who the perpetrators of such violence are. When confronted with mounting evidence of Israeli violence that constitute plausible genocide — allegations raised by respected international bodies, legal experts, and human rights organisations — the BBC did not connect the dots. This is reflected, for example, in its complete silence on the Dahiya Doctrine, a military strategy described as 'involving the application of disproportionate force and the causing of great damage and destruction to civilian property and infrastructure, and suffering to civilian populations'.[472] While Israeli and other international media have reported on the application of this doctrine in the current conflict, it was tracked on the BBC only once in passing in its broadcasts and not at all on its website.

4. We have identified 100 instances where BBC presenters actively – and often belligerently – shut down, challenged, or dismissed guests who raised the possibility of genocide taking place. This, despite mounting evidence from human rights organisations, legal experts, and the UN.

472 Report of the United Nations Fact-Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict, UN Human Rights Council, 25 September 2009, para 62 https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g09/158/66/pdf/g0915866.pdf

It is important to acknowledge that the BBC has produced some valuable reporting on specific incidents involving Israel's actions in this conflict. Articles about how Israeli soldier videos from Gaza could breach international law (with a follow-up in May 2024[473]), and investigations of war crimes in the West Bank[474] have raised important questions about specific incidents.

However, the gravity of genocide allegations demands exceptional and systematic investigative rigour. Once clear declaration of genocidal intent was made by Israelis, when the ICJ found a 'plausible risk' to Palestinians' right to be protected from genocide, together with multiple UN experts issuing warnings, and human rights organisations documenting systematic patterns of destruction — the BBC should have marshalled its resources and editorial will to investigate these claims thoroughly. Instead, it did the opposite: suppressing discussion, diminishing expert testimony, and failing to connect clear patterns of evidence.

The BBC's reluctance to investigate genocide claims stands in stark contrast to its treatment of other serious allegations in this conflict. While Palestinian casualty figures are routinely undermined with 'Hamas-run' qualifiers, the Corporation rarely mentions that the Israeli Prime Minister is wanted for war crimes or that the ICJ has found plausible genocide risk. This selective scepticism reveals not impartial journalism but active bias.

As the Polish journalist and former dissident Adam Michnik stated: 'Our responsibility is to speak with the voice of the victim, not with the voice of the butcher.'[475] In systematically suppressing examination of genocide allegations, the BBC has abdicated this fundamental duty. The consequences of this failure cannot be overstated: when a public broadcaster refuses to investigate credible genocide claims, it becomes complicit in the potential normalisation of mass atrocities.

473 Israel troops continue posting abuse footage despite pledge to act, 17 May 2024 https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-69020237

474 Israel accused of possible war crime over killing of West Bank boy, BBC News, 2 May 2024, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cw07wgrwzywo

475 Defining role of the press in genocide prevention, Committee to Protect Journalists, 6 June 2012

6. Illegally held Israelis and Palestinians are represented differently by the BBC

The BBC has established a clear double standard in how it portrays forcibly detained individuals. Despite Palestinians in Israeli custody outnumbering Israeli hostages by 40:1 (10,000 vs 251), Israeli hostages were mentioned 5.5 times more frequently in BBC articles. Palestinians, even those held without charge including hundreds of children, are consistently labelled 'prisoners' while Israelis are 'hostages'. During prisoner exchanges, Israeli releases received emotionally engaging, humanised coverage while Palestinians remained largely nameless, with reporting focused on procedural aspects rather than personal narratives. There is limited acknowledgement that many Palestinians are held without charge, trial, or due process, including hundreds of children.

During the so-called prisoner and hostage exchanges in early 2025, Israeli releases featured emotional family reunions while Palestinian releases were reported largely in procedural terms. This inequality was highlighted when Husam Zomlot, the Palestinian ambassador to the UK, challenged a BBC presenter in February 2025, arguing that Palestinian detainees are 'hostages of the Israeli martial law and system of oppression.'[476] The disparity has been noticed by audiences too, where a 'viewer complained that an interview with a released Israeli hostage showed pro-Israeli bias.' The BBC's Executive Complaints Unit rejected the complaint on the grounds that 'due impartiality was maintained on the wider political questions raised by her ordeal'.[477] Whilst the defence for the airing of this interview rightly mentions the need to sensitively reflect the individual's personal ordeal, we do not know from this defence whether similar personal approaches are given to Palestinians taken illegally by Israelis.

Though occasional reporting on Palestinian detainee conditions exists, these exceptions do not alter the overall framing wherein Israeli suffering is individualised and humanised, while Palestinian suffering is collectivised – a key plank of dehumanisation and 'othering'.

476 Dr Zomlot on BBC News: Our people are not prisoners, they are hostages held by Israel, YouTube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JMqTgMQricw

477 BBC News (6pm) BBC One, and News (6pm), BBC Radio 4, 17 April 2024, BBC Executive Complaints Unit, 4 July 2024 https://www.bbc.co.uk/contact/ecu/bbc-news-6pm-bbc-one-and-news-6pm-bbc-radio-4-17-april-2024

7. The BBC underreports attacks on press freedom in Gaza

The BBC's coverage of journalist casualties represents a quantifiable failure to report on attacks on journalists in Palestine compared to other conflict zones. Of the 176 journalists killed in Gaza according to the Committee to Protect Journalists, the BBC reported on just 11 deaths – a mere 6%. This contrasts starkly with Ukraine coverage, where the BBC reported on 10 out of 16 journalist deaths (62%) since 2022.

When the BBC did report journalist deaths, it consistently platformed Israeli denials. The BBC also failed to adequately contextualise Israel's media restrictions. Whilst occasionally mentioning that international journalists are banned from Gaza, this crucial fact – that Israel ranks 101st in Reporters Without Borders' Press Freedom Index, well below Qatar at 84th – was not routinely highlighted.

The BBC failed to report the killing of Hossam Shabat, described by Reporters Without Borders as one of 'Gaza's best-known journalists', though BBC Mundo covered his death. Similarly unreported was Zahraa Abu Skheil, who 'was killed alongside her brother and father in an Israeli airstrike while seeking refuge in a school shelter.' Despite Israeli authorities initially denying then being forced to admit responsibility for killing the Al Jazeera journalist, the BBC referenced her case only once in its Gaza coverage since 7 October 2023.

8. The BBC is more willing to cover the full facts in Ukraine than Gaza

There are distinct similarities between the Israel-Palestine conflict since 7 October 2023 and the Russia-Ukraine conflict since February 2022. Both conflicts involve powerful states, Russia and Israel – the leaders of whom are wanted by the ICC. Both countries are engaged in military actions against less-equipped adversaries, leading to significant civilian casualties.[478]

When comparing BBC coverage of Gaza with its reporting on Ukraine, we found significant disparities in attribution, language, and moral framing. The BBC provides rationale for Israeli military actions in 75% of cases but only 17% for Russian actions, discusses war crimes in Ukraine almost three times as frequently as in Gaza, and consistently names Russia as a perpetrator while often using passive language for Israeli strikes.

The BBC appears more willing to make moral judgements when reporting on Russian actions, using direct attribution and emotive language that clearly establishes responsibility. Conversely, when covering Israeli military operations, the reporting frequently employs passive constructions that distance actions from consequences. Palestinian casualty figures consistently carry the qualifying 'Hamas-run' prefix, casting doubt on their reliability – a treatment not extended to Ukrainian sources.

These editorial choices create fundamentally different narratives for audiences. The Ukraine coverage conveys a clear moral framework with identifiable villains and victims, while the Gaza coverage presents a more ambiguous picture where responsibility is diluted and suffering is depersonalised. Such inconsistencies not only undermine the BBC's claims to impartiality but also shape public understanding of these conflicts in ways that may align more with governmental positions than with journalistic principles of fairness and balance.

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478 Ukraine, Gaza : deux poids, deux mesures, Alternative Humanitaires, 27 November 2024, https://www.alternatives-humanitaires.org/fr/2024/11/27/ukraine-gaza-deux-poids-deux-mesures/

The pressure to censor journalism at the BBC

Taken together, we conclude that the BBC has systematically failed to report the Israel-Palestine conflict with the impartiality required by its Charter, instead producing coverage that devalues Palestinian lives, obscures crucial context, shields Israel from accountability, downplays atrocity and betrays the BBC's fundamental duty to properly investigate and report on credible allegations of genocide — among the most serious crimes under international law.

What would account for this dereliction of journalistic duty?

To understand this, we must examine the intense institutional pressures the Corporation has faced from influential voices determined to censor its coverage. Amplified by right-leaning and sympathetic media outlets, these voices have elicited substantive responses from BBC management – in stark contrast to the corporation's dismissal of criticism from the other side, so to speak.

The BBC's handling of the documentary 'Gaza: How to Survive a War Zone' exemplifies this trend. The pressure to remove the documentary from BBC platforms illustrates how the BBC responds to those pressurising the corporation to frame its coverage around the Israeli government's talking points.

Despite initial critical acclaim, including a four-star review from the *Telegraph*, the film became the target of a coordinated campaign, led, ironically by the *Telegraph* newspaper itself. In its review, the paper described it as 'a heartrending account' revealing 'what it is like to live in this hellish place under Israeli bombardment.'[479] The paper quickly changed its tune, amplifying claims by a pro-Israel blogger who sought to delegitimise the programme because (amongst other reasons) one of its child narrators, Abdullah, was the son of Dr Ayman al-Yazouri, a deputy minister in Gaza's agriculture ministry – a detail not disclosed in the film.

This reflects a well-worn tactic employed by Israel's supporters: discrediting Palestinian voices through guilt-by-association. In this case, they argued that since Abdullah's father held a ministerial position (albeit in what many consider a technocratic role) in a Hamas-led government, the entire programme was compromised. This mirrors the logic frequently deployed by the Israeli government to justify targeting Palestinian civilians, including doctors, journalists, and aid workers. Indeed, despite the Committee to Protect Journalists now documenting over 170 Palestinian journalists being killed in this conflict, the blogger in question has sought to justify these murders: 'Some of them [the journalists] we know have communication centres for those terrorist groups. In other words, if somebody is there, and he's helping the Hamas terrorists to communicate with each other, he's part of that military. He's a legitimate target'.[480]

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479 Gaza: How To Survive A Warzone, review, The Telegraph, 17 February 2025, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/tv/0/gaza-how-to-survive-a-warzone-bbc-two-review/

480 David Collier: Claims That Israel Is Targeting Journalists Are 'Unsupportable and Disgraceful Fiction', The Media Line, 18 January 2024, https://themedialine.org/top-stories/claims-that-israel-is-targeting-journalists-are-unsupportable-and-disgraceful-fiction/

The blogger's claim against the BBC Gaza documentary was also taken up by several groups including the UK arm of Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting and Analysis (CAMERA). CAMERA UK has published several reports claiming anti-Israel bias at the BBC and have coordinated frequently with the *Telegraph* to pressurise the BBC, most recently in May 2025 where it claimed that the BBC does not routinely say that Hamas is a proscribed terrorist organisation (even though, as we have pointed out, the BBC has never described the Israeli Prime Minister as a war crimes suspect – amongst several other omissions).[481] It is also noteworthy to state here that CAMERA UK's parent organisation in the United States defended in March 2025 the Trump administration's seizure, detention and deportation of Palestinian activists.[482]

When it came to the 'controversial' BBC documentary, the Israeli Embassy in London joined the blogger and CAMERA, demanding action on the film.[483] The Board of Deputies of British Jews – an organisation where some members face disciplinary action for speaking out against Israeli actions[484] – issued an ultimatum: unless the BBC committed to reforming its coverage by Passover, it would escalate its campaign.[485] The Campaign Against Antisemitism held protests outside Broadcasting House and launched a petition calling for suspension of the licence fee pending an investigation.[486]

Under this sustained pressure, the BBC removed the programme entirely from the iPlayer platform, with Chairman Samir Shah calling the controversy 'a dagger to the heart'[487] of the BBC's impartiality – thus undermining the independence of any future review of the programme. This swift capitulation contrasts sharply with how the BBC has handled other controversies, and has resulted in the BBC reportedly holding up another documentary, 'Gaza: Medics Under Fire', due to fears of similar backlash.[488] In an unprecedented open letter signed by hundreds of media workers including the BBC's Anita Rani and former sports anchor Gary Lineker, the Corporation was condemned for removing the programme and said that its permanent removal would signal that 'Palestinian children's stories are only valid if their families pass arbitrary "purity tests" [and that] racialised smears against Palestinians outweigh journalistic ethics and public interest.'[489]

The BBC's actions towards the reaction to this documentary is also evident in its response to complaints. The BBC attracted over 8,000 complaints within a short period after 7 October 2023.[490] Since that date to the end of March 2025, the BBC's Executive Complaints Unit (ECU) has responded to at least 100 complaints related to the Israel-Gaza conflict, as published on their website.[491] In our research, the vast majority were not upheld (93%). Of all the complaints reviewed, only 7% were either upheld, partly upheld, or resolved.

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481 BBC fails to call Hamas terrorists nine in 10 times, The Telegraph, 10 May 2025, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2025/05/10/bbc-fails-to-call-hamas-terrorists-nine-in-10-times-report/

482 Mahmoud Khalil: What the Media Isn't Telling You, CAMERA, 19 March 2025, https://www.camera.org/article/mahmoud-khalil-what-the-media-isnt-telling-you/

483 Israeli Ambassador Tzipi Hotovely, X.com, 19 February 2025, https://x.com/TzipiHotovely/status/1892264424435490925

484 Head of British Jewish body criticises members' open letter attack on Israel, BBC News, 17 April 2025, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c8rg0xvdm8po

485 "Board gives BBC bosses Pesach deadline to commit to tackling community concerns", Jewish News, 21 March 2025, https://www.jewishnews.co.uk/board-gives-bbc-chiefs-pesach-deadline-to-commit-to-tackling-community-concerns/

486 BBC reiterates commitment to thematic review of Gaza coverage, Campaign Against Antisemitism, 6 May 2025, https://antisemitism.org/bbc-reportedly-announces-review-into-bbc-arabic/

487 Culture, Media and Sport Committee, Oral evidence: The work of the BBC, HC 331, 4 March 2025, Q53, https://committees.parliament.uk/event/23124/formal-meeting-oral-evidence-session/

488 BBC criticised for delaying documentary about Gaza doctors, The Times, 5 May 2025, https://www.thetimes.com/uk/media/article/bbc-criticised-for-delaying-documentary-about-gaza-doctors-zvmrx8jms

489 1,000+ programme-makers condemn censorship and racism after BBC pulls Gaza documentary, Artists for Palestine, 26 February 2025, https://artistsforpalestine.org.uk/2025/02/26/500-programme-makers-condemn-censorship-and-racism-after-bbc-pulls-gaza-documentary/

490 BBC Gaza coverage prompts 8,000 complaints, Press Gazette, 20 March 2024, https://pressgazette.co.uk/news/bbc-gaza-coverage-complaints-tim-davie/

491 BBC Executive Complaints Unit, https://www.bbc.co.uk/contact/recent-ecu

It gave detailed responses to complaints about anti-Israel bias, including one to the Board of Deputies of British Jews and the Campaign Against Antisemitism about reporting of the explosion at the Al-Ahli Arab Baptist Hospital explosion on 17 October 2023. There has been continuing speculation[492] regarding the party responsible for the explosion at the facility, necessitating an independent inquiry. In their response to the advocacy groups, the BBC's ECU acknowledged that 'it was not consistent with the BBC's standards of due accuracy to offer any view about responsibility for the incident at a point where so little reliable information was available.'[493] Since then, the hospital has faced relentless Israeli attacks, leading to its closure in April 2025 – it was Gaza's last remaining emergency hospital.[494]

When it comes to Israel-Palestine, the BBC fails to deliver impartial journalism

It would appear therefore, that the BBC is indeed responsive to pro-Israeli pressure to censor the BBC's reporting of this conflict. We have identified systematic omissions by the BBC to report the news faithfully, as well as clear signs that the corporation is more responsive to pro-Israeli pressure to censor the news.

These data points affirm the concerns raised by many journalists from inside the BBC's newsroom. One anonymous whistleblower revealed on Al Jazeera's Listening Post programme:

> **'Israeli spokespeople who we did have on were given a lot of free reign to say whatever they wanted with very little push back...whereas Palestinian guests were asked to condemn Hamas, almost as though condemning Hamas was the sort of price to pay before they could be humanised in our coverage. Many of our own presenters when faced with an interviewee who was Palestinian or who had lost family in Gaza, there was just such a lack of compassion...as a result a number of producers were really reticent about putting a vulnerable Palestinian guest in front of a BBC presenter.'[495]**

There have been several other reports of internal dissent from journalists alarmed at the BBC's approach as early as November 2023. Writing to the BBC Director-General Tim Davie, BBC correspondent Rami Ruhayem expressed his concern about the dehumanisation of Palestinians in the BBC's coverage. He stated that 'Words like "massacre", "slaughter", and "atrocities" are being used — prominently in reference to actions by Hamas, but hardly, if at all, in reference to actions by Israel."[496]

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492 Israeli Disinformation, Al-Ahli Hospital, 15 February 2024, https://forensic-architecture.org/investigation/israeli-disinformation-al-ahli-hospital

493 Op. Cit. The Context, BBC News Channel, 17 October 2023 and related items, BBC Executive Complaints Unit, 23 November 2023

494 Israeli air strike destroys part of last fully functional hospital in Gaza City, BBC News, 13 April 2025, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cjr7l123zy5o

495 Inside Western media's reporting on Gaza, The Listening Post, Al Jazeera, 4 October 2024, 18:40 mins to 19:36 mins, https://youtu.be/UAmk4efA2t0?si=dxcVMI-Lubdnp7FZ

496 Turmoil at the BBC: "Gravest Possible Concerns" at Its Gaza Coverage, 1 November 2023, https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/45466

In January 2024 for example, BBC journalists wrote an internal letter to the BBC's management complaining of the organisation's failure to give 'due prominence' to the ICJ's proceedings against Israel – resulting in a reportedly furious defence from a BBC executive.[497] In November 2024, over 100 BBC journalists called out the 'erosion of its own editorial standards has put its impartiality and independence at serious risk. Basic journalistic tenets have been lacking when it comes to holding Israel to account for its actions.'[498] Other journalists have left the corporation and fearlessly spoken out. Karishma Patel, for example, has revealed a 'toxic culture' in the BBC newsroom where 'editorial decisions made out of fear of external complaints'.[499]

A call for independent institutional accountability

The BBC does however present important and valuable reports on Israel/Palestine. Investigative pieces by BBC Verify exposed videos showing Israeli soldiers abusing Palestinian detainees,[500] and some correspondents like Jeremy Bowen[501] have provided important context about the occupation. However, these remain exceptions rather than the rule.

Ultimately, we would posit that the BBC's underreporting or total lack of reporting of crucial context suggests incompetence or a capitulation to censor information. From casting doubt on casualty figures to using starkly passive language to describe Palestinian suffering, the BBC is not doing what it should. This was best articulated by the former BBC presenter Gary Lineker – a man under relentless pressure for expressing his views on the situation: 'Facts are the most important thing...if it's raining outside, you don't need someone's opinion to say it's not raining. You want to state actually what is the weather outside'.[502]

We understand that the BBC has committed to a thematic review of its Gaza coverage, which should be welcomed.[503] We are, however, concerned about the robustness and independence of this review given that there are reports that it will be focused only on the output of BBC Arabic[504] – a long-standing target of pro-Israeli government censors – rather than a comprehensive assessment of the BBC's output and editorial processes. We call on the BBC to treat seriously the damning evidence we have presented here. While we recognise the difficult challenge the BBC faces in covering this war, we contend that the Corporation has approached it with preconceived notions that prevented accurate reporting, buckling in the face of overwhelming pressure from influential advocacy groups.

The issues identified cannot be addressed through minor adjustments to language or occasional gestures toward balance. They require a fundamental reassessment of the institutional frameworks and editorial processes that have produced these patterns of coverage. As a publicly funded broadcaster with immense global influence, the BBC shapes how millions understand one of the world's most consequential conflicts. When it systematically devalues Palestinian lives and shields Israel from scrutiny of its atrocities, it fails not only its journalistic obligations but also its responsibility to the British public.

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497 BBC Exec Downplayed Israel 'Plausible Genocide' Ruling to Dismayed Colleagues, Novara Media, 9 January 2025, https://novaramedia.com/2025/01/09/bbc-exec-downplayed-israel-plausible-genocide-ruling-to-dismayed-colleagues/

498 Broadcaster bias is failing to hold Israel to account, The Independent, 1 November 2024, https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/letters/bbc-bias-israel-gaza-tim-davie-b2639654.html

499 The BBC I know has a toxic culture – and freelancers are fodder for it, The Independent, 30 April 2025, https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/bbc-workplace-culture-review-samir-shah-huw-edwards-b2741582.html

500 Israel to act on soldier misconduct after BBC investigation, BBC News, 12 February 2024, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-68277124

501 Israel-Gaza: The status quo is smashed. The future is messy and dangerous, BBC News, 9 December 2023, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-67652494

502 Amal Rajon Interviews Gary Lineker, 2 May 2025, https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m002b9qm

503 Meeting of the BBC Editorial Guidelines and Standards Committee, BBC, 16 January 2025, https://www.bbc.co.uk/aboutthebbc/documents/egscmin-16-jan-2025.pdf

504 BBC chair says Arabic channel facing independent review, Jewish News, 7 May 2025, https://www.jewishnews.co.uk/bbc-chair-says-arabic-channel-facing-independent-review/

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Whose Lives Matter?

Value Palestinian lives: With over 34 times more civilians killed, ensure Palestinian deaths are covered proportionately, with clear victim and perpetrator attribution.

Humanise Palestinian victims equally: Ensure Palestinian victims receive personal profiles, family testimonials and the emotional depth afforded to Israeli victims, rather than treating them as anonymous statistics.

Be clear who is doing the killing: Avoid passive language when describing the killing of Palestinians, clearly identifying Israel as the perpetrator.

Routine Israeli denials should be challenged: Israeli denials should be caveated with the facts of previous high-profile Israeli denials which have subsequently proved to be false. For example, the killing of the Palestinian child Hind Rajab.

Apply death toll prominence proportionally: When Palestinian casualties significantly outnumber Israeli casualties, reflect this reality in headline prominence and story placement, avoiding false equivalence in reporting.

Ditch qualifiers designed to cast doubt on casualty figures: Adopt peer journalistic standards to use the 'Hamas-run' qualifier sparingly and only when directly relevant, acknowledging that Gaza Health Ministry figures have been consistently deemed as reliable by international bodies, including the United Nations.

Provide context for casualty debates: When discussing contested figures, note Israel's refusal to provide alternative civilian death toll data.

Acknowledge verification limitations: Clearly state when Israel prevents independent verification by barring journalists' access to Gaza when reporting on casualty figures. Also use the word censorship to describe Israel's position on foreign journalists.

2. BBC's Asymmetric Language of Violence

Identify the killers: The perpetrator of violence responsible for killing civilians should be identified and named in headlines. Israeli perpetrators should always be referred to when reporting on Israeli violence.

Review language for bias: BBC should conduct regular language reviews to assess if there is a bias in its staff's use of language towards one side or party.

Ensure language reflects journalistic standards: BBC staff should receive training to identify loaded language and partisan messaging, including reviewing resources such as the Israel Project's Global Language Dictionary. This would enable them to recognise when terms serve advocacy purposes rather than journalistic objectivity.

Use active language for Palestinian victims: Passive language to describe Palestinian victims should be avoided. Palestinians are killed by Israeli action and occupation tactics, they don't just die, and the language should reflect this.

3. Who speaks? Giving a fair hearing to Israeli and Palestinian perspectives

Balance spokesperson representation: Interview Palestinian representatives at a ratio proportionate to Israeli ones, ensuring audiences hear diverse perspectives, including Israeli dissenting voices.

Equalise treatment of narratives: Fact check claims made by Israeli interviewees and be consistent by presenting Palestinian perspectives to Israeli representatives in the same way as Israeli claims are presented to Palestinian interviewees.

Don't suppress discussions: Permit discussions of genocide, apartheid, and war crimes based on evidence rather than systematically shutting down such mentions.

Challenge all extreme rhetoric: Apply equal scrutiny to dehumanising language from all sources, including regular guests who express anti-Palestinian sentiments.

Full disclosure of guests: When featuring commentators with strong pro-Israel advocacy records, disclose their affiliations and past statements to ensure audiences can assess their perspectives.

End condemnation prerequisites: Abolish the practice of requiring Palestinian interviewees to condemn violence before being allowed to discuss their experiences or perspectives, especially as Israeli officials are rarely asked to condemn what many are describing as the 'live-streamed genocide'.

Challenge misinformation and false claims: Apply rigorous fact-checking to claims from all sides, particularly from Israeli officials with a documented history of spreading falsehoods.

Diversify expert voices: Broaden the pool of commentators to include more Palestinian academics, analysts and human rights experts rather than relying predominantly on Western or Israeli sources.

4. Telling the full story

Provide consistent historical context: When reporting on events following 7 October, include information about the decades-long occupation, blockade, and pre-October violence against Palestinians. Don't shut down interviewees who attempt to do so.

Identify occupation clearly: Routinely let readers and viewers know that Gaza has been and remains under effective Israeli occupation despite the 2005 withdrawal, as confirmed by international law experts.

Ditch 'both-siderism' – there is the Occupier and the Occupied: The BBC should drop its current two sides narrative which equalises Israel and Palestinians. Reporting should clearly state that this is an ongoing conflict between an occupier (Israel) and those who are occupied (Palestinians).

Give context to longstanding Israeli operations: Cover Israeli military policies like the Dahiya Doctrine and Hannibal Directive that are essential for understanding the strategic context of operations in Gaza.

Hold our UK government accountable: Investigate and report on British military, intelligence and diplomatic support for Israel's operations, applying the same standards used for other conflicts.

Report the reality of Israeli apartheid: Present the assessments of major human rights organisations regarding Israel's apartheid policies, treating these claims with the same seriousness as other human rights violations.

Explain Palestinian rights under international law: Clarify that Palestinians have internationally recognised rights to self-determination and to resist occupation, especially given the disproportionate mentions of Israel's right to defend itself.

Flag well-documented Israeli opposition to a Palestinian state: The past positions and utterances of Israeli leaders in reference to Palestinians and their aspirations should be made clear to audiences. For example, Netanyahu has categorically stated his opposition to the establishment of a Palestinian state.

5. Genocide and war crimes

Investigate shortcomings in highlighting genocidal claims: Israeli leaders have consistently signalled their genocidal intent which has been carried out as intended since 7 October 2023. The BBC needs to investigate its shortcoming in failing to alert its audiences about this.

Connect patterns of evidence: With thousands of airstrikes and thousands more killed, the BBC should not be treating acts of Israeli violence in isolation.

Apply the war crimes framework consistently: Use the term 'war crime' based on objective criteria of international law rather than selectively applying it to some conflicts but not others.

Present international legal proceedings factually and in a timely manner: Report on international legal proceedings without minimising their significance, including the International Court of Justice's 'plausible genocide' finding.

Do not shut down genocide allegations: Permit experts, officials, and witnesses to express their assessment of whether actions constitute genocide without immediate editorial dismissal. If the Israeli perspective must be provided, then those of respected neutral and international (humanitarian) organisations on the topic, should also be provided.

Remind audiences that Israeli leaders are war crimes suspects: Routinely reference that Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu and former Defence Minister Yoav Gallant are wanted for war crimes by the International Criminal Court when reporting on their statements or actions.

6. Hostages versus prisoners

Apply equitable terminology: Use ‘detainees’ or ‘captives’ rather than ‘prisoners’ for Palestinians held without charge or trial, reserving ‘prisoner’ only for those convicted through due process.

Provide proportional context: When reporting on Israeli hostages, consistently include information about the 10,000+ Palestinians held by Israel, including hundreds of children and those held without charge.

Balance coverage of releases: Ensure equal coverage, humanisation and personal storytelling for Palestinian detainees during exchanges, particularly naming and profiling Palestinian children released.

Report detention conditions: Routinely include context from human rights organisations about conditions, alleged torture, and deaths in Israeli detention centres.

Explain administrative detention: Regularly explain Israel’s practice of holding Palestinians without charge or trial for indefinite periods, a practice condemned by international human rights organisations.

Avoid dehumanising language: Refrain from referring to Palestinian children as ‘teenage boys’ when Israeli minors in similar age ranges are described as ‘children’. Be consistent.

Create dedicated profile pages: Just as the BBC maintains a dedicated page profiling Israeli hostages, develop an equivalent resource detailing Palestinian detainees, including their stories and circumstances.

7. Killing journalists and censorship

Be a standard bearer for journalists and journalism: Just as the BBC would stand up for media workers in other parts of the world, regularly report the killing of journalists as a press freedom issue.

Signpost Israeli crackdown on press freedom: Make clear to audiences that Israel is the actor censoring journalists by blocking access and ensure their claims and counterclaims are verified.

8. Two-Tier reporting: Ukraine & Gaza

Standardise attribution of responsibility: Apply the same direct attribution practices to Israeli attacks that are used for Russian ones (e.g., 'Israeli strike kills 50 at school' rather than '50 killed in strike on school').

Be consistent in identifying war crimes: Discuss alleged Israeli war crimes with the same frequency and directness applied to Russian actions in Ukraine.

Humanise victims equally: Ensure Palestinian civilian casualties receive the same personalised, named coverage given to Ukrainian victims.

Balance justification challenges: Challenge military justifications from all parties with equal rigour, rather than accepting Israeli rationales while questioning Russian ones.

QUESTIONS FOR THE BBC

1

Accountability for Systematic Bias
Given the extensive evidence of bias in this report—including 33 times more coverage per Israeli death than Palestinian, emotive headlines reserved for Israeli victims, and omission of Israeli genocidal statements—how does the BBC reconcile this with its Charter obligation to provide impartial news? Will it acknowledge that 'due impartiality' has failed as a framework for covering Israel's war on Gaza?

2

The 'Hamas-run' Qualifier and Source Reliability
Why does the BBC persist in using the 'Hamas-run' qualifier—appearing 1,155 times—when other leading news organisations have moved away from this practice, and when the UN and other international bodies have consistently validated these figures? Why aren't similar qualifiers used for Israeli sources, such as identifying Netanyahu as an ICC war crimes suspect? Will the BBC begin applying equal scrutiny and avoid treating Israeli sources as inherently reliable?

3

Dehumanisation of Palestinian Suffering
How does the BBC justify near-equal humanising coverage (279 Israeli vs 201 Palestinian articles) despite Palestinians suffering 34 times more deaths? Why are Palestinian minors described as 'teenage boys' while Israeli minors are called 'children'? Will the BBC commit to equal humanisation regardless of nationality?

4

Language Standards and Training
Given that terms like 'barbaric', 'slaughter', and 'massacre' are used 3.6 times more for Israeli victims and terms like 'butchered' only for them, will the BBC introduce mandatory training on emotive language use? What steps will be taken to prevent linguistic bias in future reporting?

5

Active versus Passive Language

Why is passive language ('died') typically used for Palestinian victims, while Israeli victims are described using active terms ('killed', 'murdered')? Will the BBC set clear editorial guidelines to ensure perpetrators are identified, especially when covering Israeli airstrikes?

6

Palestinian Representation

Why were fewer Palestinians (1,085) than Israelis (2,350) interviewed, and why were Palestinians pressed to condemn Hamas 38 times while Israeli officials were not asked to condemn their government's actions? How will the BBC ensure fair and proportional representation?

7

Historical Context and Occupation

Why did only 0.5% of BBC articles include historical context on occupation, settlements, and pre-October violence? Will the BBC commit to routinely acknowledging Gaza's occupation and referencing determinations by the ICJ and human rights groups about apartheid?

8

Genocide and War Crimes Coverage

Why has the BBC downplayed genocide allegations over 100 times while omitting Israeli genocidal statements such as Netanyahu's Amalek reference cited by the ICJ? Why are war crimes in Ukraine covered 2.6 times more than in Gaza? Will the BBC apply the same investigative standards to investigating credible genocide allegations with the same rigour applied to other conflicts?

9

Consistency in Editorial Standards

If Israeli counter-arguments to genocide are included, will the BBC also include Palestinian responses to Israeli allegations of terrorism and barbarism? Why is Hamas consistently identified as a 'proscribed terrorist organisation' when Netanyahu is not consistently identified as a war crime suspect wanted by the ICC?

10 **Independent Review and Accountability**
Will the BBC undertake a full, independent review of its Gaza coverage across all platforms—not just BBC Arabic? Will the process involve external experts and lead to the implementation of all recommendations?

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11 **Editorial Independence**
Following pressure that led to the removal of Gaza: How to Survive a War Zone from iPlayer and the shelving of Basement Films documentary focusing on the experiences of medics and surviving family members, how will the BBC protect editorial decisions from political lobbying? What safeguards will be introduced to maintain independence?

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12 **Staff Concerns**
How will the BBC address the concerns of over 100 staff complaints about the 'erosion of editorial standards' and the failure to 'hold Israel to account'? What steps will be taken to ensure that BBC journalists can report accurately without fear of internal censorship or external pressure?

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13 **International Law and Occupation**
Will the BBC identify Israel as the occupying power and apartheid state in line with international consensus and human rights findings, without diluting this with caveats like "Israel denies"? Will it commit to fact-checking Israeli claims that contradict international law?

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14 **Media Censorship and Access**
Given Israel's ban on foreign journalists entering Gaza, will the BBC consistently highlight this restriction in its reporting? How will it convey the impact of media censorship on verification and independent coverage?

APPENDIX 1: CORE METHODOLOGY

This section outlines the methodology for the Large Language Model Analysis, which forms the bedrock of the report. Other analyses (e.g. key word and key phrase detection and desk research of relevant sources) are not covered in this section but are referenced in the footnotes.

The study employed a computational approach, utilising Large Language Models (LLMs) to systematically examine BBC's coverage of the Israel-Gaza war over a one-year period. Rather than relying on subjective human interpretation of complex concepts like bias or sympathy, we developed a framework that responsibly leverages AI's ability to consistently apply objective criteria across vast volumes of content.

Data Collection and Preprocessing

We collected datasets covering the Israel-Gaza war and the Ukraine-Russia war from the following sources:

Israel-Gaza War (7 October 2023 to 6 October 2024):

- Broadcast: BBC1, BBC2, BBC News, BBC World News, BBC World Service, BBC Radio 4, BBC Radio 5 via the Critical Mention media monitoring platform
- Online: BBC English-language website via Meltwater media intelligence platform

Ukraine War (24 February 2022 to 23 February 2023):

- Online: BBC English-language website via Meltwater

For online articles, basic keywords (Israel, Gaza, Palestine, Palestinian, Hamas, Ukraine, Russia) were used to search for and identify relevant content. For broadcast transcripts, an expanded keyword set was necessary (including terms like IDF, Netanyahu and location names within Gaza) because Critical Mention fragments broadcast content into 1-minute segments, and key terms like 'Israel' or Palestine' might not appear in every 1-minute segment of a relevant broadcast. Despite this expanded approach, a limitation of our broadcast dataset is that it may not capture all relevant clips due to this segmentation issue. Following this, we stitched consecutive 1-minute segments from the same channel/programme into longer clips to capture coverage more effectively. These stitched segments are typically referred to as segments or clips throughout our analysis.

The transcripts from the Critical Mention monitoring service provide only raw text without any structural elements - they lack speaker identifications, section delimiters, or indicators for speaker transitions. This makes it difficult to determine who is speaking at any given point in the broadcast segment. We prompted a Large Language Model (Claude 3.5 Sonnet as discussed further below) to diarise the transcript, transforming it into a structured format with clearly labelled speakers and transitions, enabling more effective human and AI reading and analysis. The diarisation prompt enforced rules for speaker identification, relying on narrative cues, quotations, questions, speech continuity, and explicit introductions.

During this process, clips were also classified as either interviews or non-interviews to facilitate targeted analysis of different content types. We excluded (multi-speaker) panel discussions from our analysis, as speaker identification becomes ambiguous when multiple participants interact simultaneously, compromising our analytical framework which requires clear speaker identification.

As mentioned in the statistical validation framework below, all LLM classifications, including diarisation, were subject to human validation and achieved high accuracy.

Finally, duplicates in the dataset of articles and transcripts were removed to prevent overcounting. Very short articles (<150 words) and clips (<3 minutes) were also excluded as they typically lacked sufficient depth for robust analysis and could distort overall results. Live pages are also not included in the online article dataset.

Dataset Summary

Content Type	Initial Dataset	Final Dataset	Primary Factor in Change in Quantity
Gaza War (Articles)	20,247	3,873	De-duplication
Ukraine War (Articles)	17,222	7,748	De-duplication
Gaza War (Broadcast Clips)	518,730 (1-min segments)	32,092 (8,474 interviews + 23,618 non-interviews)	Segment stitching

Analytical Framework: Objective Content Analysis

We designed a computational framework that operationalises subjective concepts into measurable criteria that AI can consistently identify across thousands of articles. This approach spans multiple analytical categories including war crimes coverage, casualty reporting, victim portrayal, historical context provision, and defence coverage.

Framework Example: Victim Portrayal Analysis

Our approach to measuring sympathy demonstrates our methodology's objectivity. Rather than asking the LLM to determine whether content evokes "sympathy," we established specific, measurable criteria including:

- Presence of personal details (names, ages, family relationships)
- Use of emotive versus clinical language in descriptions
- Inclusion of personal narratives or testimonials from family/community

The LLM then consistently applied these concrete criteria through a chain-of-thought reasoning (see below for definition), ensuring reproducible and transparent analysis across all content.

Comparative Approach

We conducted parallel analyses to ensure objectivity and consistency. We compared Israeli vs. Palestinian perpetrator/victim coverage within the Gaza conflict using identical analytical frameworks for both parties. Additionally, we analysed BBC's coverage of similar elements across different conflicts (Gaza and Ukraine), examining how the broadcaster reports on war crimes allegations, casualty reporting, and military defence justifications. This cross-conflict comparison provided valuable context for understanding BBC's reporting patterns.

Computational Implementation

Large Language Model Analysis

We employed Claude 3.5 Sonnet, a state-of-the-art language model that has demonstrated strong performance on the MMLU-Pro benchmark designed to evaluate the multitask capabilities of language models across diverse subjects, achieving 88.3% accuracy. This capability was enhanced through:

- Chain-of-thought reasoning: A methodology that requires the model to articulate its reasoning process step-by-step, significantly improving accuracy and enabling transparent verification of analytical decisions
- Identical prompts applied across all content for consistency
- Explicit criteria preventing subjective interpretation

Statistical Validation Framework

The large-language-model classifier's performance was evaluated using a rigorous statistical framework to ensure that observed patterns reflected genuine model skill rather than chance or or statistical distortions from having disproportionate sample sizes across categories (for example, having many more 'Yes' answers than 'No' answers for a given analysis).

1. Balanced outcome categories

For the analyses whose positive and negative categories were reasonably balanced (no category smaller than 25 %), the following protocol, commonly used for evaluating machine learning classifiers, was applied:

Target benchmark: The reference was the proportion-chance criterion (PCC)—the expected accuracy of a model randomly assigning labels based on observed category proportions. Success required the model's accuracy to exceed 1.25 × PCC.

Power analysis: A one-sample proportion test determined the minimum sample size required to achieve 80% statistical power for exceeding the benchmark.

Human assessment: Subject matter experts manually evaluated a random selection of items (e.g. articles, headlines, or transcripts) according to the calculated minimum sample size (from the 'Power Analysis'). The model's performance was then measured by comparing its ratings against these expert ratings. This was done separately for each analysis performed by the LLM.

Outcome: All tests published in this report surpassed the 1.25 × PCC threshold, and across all analyses, agreement between model and human ratings ranged from 90% to 100%.

2. Highly Skewed Outcome Categories

For skewed distributions, standard power calculations would have necessitated impractically large sample sizes, and the PCC becomes less informative as the positive category shrinks. Therefore, a two-tier validation approach was implemented:

Tier 1: All items flagged as positive by the model were individually reviewed by human assessors.

Tier 2: A simple random sample of 2.5% of the remaining (negative-flagged) items was also reviewed.

This approach efficiently assessed the entire corpus, focusing resources on items with the highest risk of misclassification. Agreement between model predictions and human assessment exceeded 98%.

The overall methodology combines quantitative precision with transparent analytical processes, producing findings grounded in clearly defined, measurable criteria rather than interpretive judgment.

Limitations

Several methodological limitations should be acknowledged:

1. **Considerations Regarding LLM-Based Analysis:**
    - TThe application of Large Language Models (LLMs) in content analysis is a rapidly developing area. While LLMs provide scalability and can systematically apply predefined analytical criteria across large datasets, there are risks that without careful mitigation, they may not always fully capture complex context or subtle nuances in language, or be able to classify data perfectly. Whilst these risks cannot be fully mitigated, the likelihood and impact of these risks can be managed. Our approach has done this by relying on specifically designed, precisely worded chain-of-thought prompts to guide the model's reasoning and ensure consistency across analyses. Additionally, all key findings have undergone rigorous human assessment and statistical validation to ensure the robustness and reliability of the results.
2. **Dataset Scope and Content Types:**
    - The online dataset excludes BBC live pages, videos, articles shorter than 150 words, and non-English language articles, limiting the breadth and multimedia representation of the analysis.
    - Broadcast panel discussions and very short clips (<3 minutes) are also excluded due to challenges in accurate speaker identification and insufficient length for robust analysis.
3. **Limitations in Keyword Filtering and Segment Reconstruction:**
    - Broadcast content collected via Critical Mention's 1-minute segmentation may omit relevant segments if key terms such as 'Israel', 'Palestine', 'IDF' or location names within Gaza do not appear in a given 1-minute transcript. This can fragment longer discussions, potentially splitting coherent conversations into disconnected clips. Consequently, some content may be inadvertently excluded due to minimum-length criteria (<3 minutes).
4. **Transcription and Diarisation Accuracy:**
    - The analysis depends significantly on the quality of transcriptions from Critical Mention and the LLM-based diarisation process. Misattributions in speaker identification or inaccuracies in distinguishing interview from non-interview segments could impact the reliability of results, particularly when attributing specific statements or sentiments to BBC personnel. Notably, human assessments (explained above) have confirmed a high level of statistical accuracy for the LLM diarisation process.
5. **Equal Analytical Weighting:**
    - The analytical framework treats all content equally irrespective of duration or length, meaning shorter clips (e.g., 4-minute segments) carry the same analytical weight as much longer content (e.g., 1-hour programs), potentially skewing findings or understating the complexity present in more extensive broadcasts and articles.

APPENDIX 2 : LARGE LANGUAGE MODEL (LLM) CLASSIFICATION METHODOLOGIES

This Appendix explains how specific classifications were defined for our analysis and insights. They should be read in conjunction with the Core Methodology at the beginning of this report.

LLM Classification Methodology #1 - Casualties in Article Headline

Headlines must explicitly state or strongly imply casualties through direct death-related language (e.g., ''killed', 'bodies', 'died') while clearly establishing nationality or location context within the headline itself. Each headline is evaluated independently of the article body, requiring self-contained evidence of both conflict relation and victim affiliation. Only casualties with unambiguous Israeli or Palestinian identification are counted, with references requiring clear connection to current war operations rather than other incidents.

All articles in the Gaza war dataset have been evaluated.

LLM Classification Methodology #2 - Casualties in Article Lead Section

The first five sentences must explicitly state or strongly imply casualties through direct death-related language (e.g., 'killed', 'bodies', 'died') while clearly establishing nationality or location context within these opening sentences. Only casualties with unambiguous Israeli or Palestinian identification are counted, with references requiring clear connection to current war operations rather than other incidents.

All articles in the Gaza war dataset have been evaluated.

LLM Classification Methodology #3 - Casualties in Article Body

The article body must explicitly state or strongly imply casualties through direct death-related language (e.g., 'killed', 'bodies', 'died') while clearly establishing nationality or location context. Only casualties with unambiguous Israeli or Palestinian identification are counted, with references requiring clear connection to current war operations rather than other incidents.

All articles in the Gaza war dataset have been evaluated.

LLM Classification Methodology #4 - Casualties in Broadcast Clips

Broadcast clips must explicitly state or strongly imply casualties through direct death-related language (e.g., 'killed', 'bodies', 'died') while establishing nationality or location context. Victim affiliation can be inferred from contextual indicators and uniquely from attack perpetrator (Hamas attacks imply Israeli casualties, Israeli attacks imply Palestinian casualties, unless specified otherwise). Only casualties with unambiguous Israeli or Palestinian identification are counted, with references requiring clear connection to current war operations rather than other incidents.

Only statements from BBC personnel are included. Interview clips have been excluded from this analysis i.e. only non-interview clips have been evaluated.

LLM Classification Methodology #5 - Victim Sympathy - Palestine/Israel

Articles were examined for Palestinian/Israeli victim references and assessed for sympathetic framing through emotional testimonials (e.g., 'recounted through tears'), personal characterisations (e.g., 'thoughtful and kind'), or humanising details about victims (e.g., age, family information, personal stories). Clinical or impersonal phrasing, focusing solely on numbers or maintaining a detached tone, indicates absence of sympathy.

All articles in the Gaza war dataset have been evaluated.

LLM Classification Methodology #6 - Personal Profiling - Palestine/Israel

Personal profiling analysis examined the depth of individual victim portrayals through six distinct aspects: character descriptions, life narratives, emotional portrayals, personal testimonials, humanising details, and family relationships. Coverage qualifies as notable when named individuals are portrayed through multiple profiling elements, establishing distinct personal identities beyond collective references.

All articles in the Gaza war dataset with Victim Sympathy identified (LLM classification #5) have been evaluated.

LLM Classification Methodology #7 - Language Analysis of Articles

Words explicitly used to describe violent actions in the war (e.g. 'killed', 'kidnapped', 'massacred') were classified by their target / victim (either Israeli or Palestinian) and aggregated across all articles. Quotes have been segregated and aggregated separately from the rest of the article (non-quotes). Only words that directly imply harm or death were included.

All articles in the Gaza war dataset have been evaluated.

LLM Classification Methodology #8 - Language Analysis of Broadcast Clips

Selected emotive terms describing violence (e.g. 'barbaric', 'atrocity', 'massacre') were identified in broadcast clips and classified by their target/victim (either Israeli or Palestinian). Analysis distinguished between BBC personnel's own words and external voices (non-BBC speakers). Mentions were aggregated across all clips, maintaining these distinctions between speaker type and target group.

All broadcast clips in the Gaza war dataset have been evaluated.

LLM Classification Methodology #9 - Interview analysis - Interviewee nationality

Interviewees are classified as Israeli, Palestinian, or Other based on their nationality as explicitly stated in the transcript, typically when the interviewer introduces them (e.g., 'Israeli government spokesperson', 'Palestinian Authority official'). Those with dual nationality including Israeli or Palestinian (e.g., Israeli-American, Palestinian-British) are classified as Israeli or Palestinian respectively. All other nationalities are classified as Other.

All broadcast interview clips have been evaluated.

LLM Classification Methodology #10 - Interview analysis - Interviewer sharing Palestinian / Israeli perspective

An interviewer is classified as sharing an Israeli or Palestinian perspective when they explicitly introduce viewpoints using phrases like 'Israel / the IDF / Israeli representatives' or 'Palestinians / Palestinian representatives' followed by verbs such as 'argue / maintain / claim / state / insist / contend / assert / believe / hold / say / declare'.

All broadcast interview clips have been evaluated.

LLM Classification Methodology #11 - Interview analysis - Asking for Condemnation

Interviews were examined for explicit requests for condemnation, where interviewers directly ask interviewees to condemn specific events or actions. Requests are classified as condemnation requests only when they use the exact word 'condemn' and are phrased as direct questions requiring yes/no responses, such as 'Do you condemn these attacks?' General opinion questions or requests using other terminology are not counted.

All broadcast interview clips have been evaluated.

LLM Classification Methodology #12 - October 7th Context - Articles

Articles were examined for references to the October 7 Hamas attack and assessed for historical context that explicitly connects pre-October 7 events to the attack. Seven categories of historical context have been evaluated: Occupation of Palestinian territories, the Nakba, settlements, Israeli violations of international law, Palestinian prisoners detained without trial, the blockade of Gaza, and pre-October 2023 casualties. Only pre-October 7 events explicitly framed as motivation or justification for the attack are classified as historical context.

All articles in the Gaza war dataset have been evaluated.

LLM Classification Methodology #13 - October 7th Context - Broadcast Clips

Broadcast clips have been examined for references to the October 7 Hamas attack and assessed for historical context that explicitly connects pre-October 7 events to the attack. Seven categories of historical context have been evaluated: Occupation of Palestinian territories, the Nakba, settlements, Israeli violations of international law, Palestinian prisoners detained without trial, the blockade of Gaza, and pre-October 2023 casualties. Only pre-October 7 events explicitly framed as motivation or justification for the attack are classified as historical context.

Only statements from BBC personnel are included. Interview clips have been excluded from this analysis i.e. only non-interview clips have been evaluated.

LLM Classification Methodology #14 - Mention of War Crimes - Gaza / Ukraine

Articles were examined for explicit references to war crimes in Gaza and Ukraine. Allegations of war crimes do not need to come from an official or recognised legal authority, with quotes from activists, spokespersons, and non-official entities all counted in the analysis.

All articles in the Gaza and Ukraine war datasets have been evaluated.

LLM Classification Methodology #15 - Perpetrator of War Crimes - Gaza / Ukraine

Where war crimes are mentioned, articles were analysed for explicit attribution of the war crime(s) to Israel or Russia (including references to Israeli/Russian forces, authorities, or military) with Palestinians or Ukrainians identified as victims.

All articles in the Gaza and Ukraine war datasets with War Crimes mentioned (LLM classification #14) have been evaluated.

LLM Classification Methodology #16 - Prisoners / Hostages

Articles were examined for references to prisoners or hostages through specific terminology ('hostages', 'captives', 'prisoners', 'detainees') and assessed for prisoner/hostage nationality (Israeli or Palestinian).

All articles in the Gaza war dataset have been evaluated.

LLM Classification Methodology #17 - Percentage Israeli / Palestinian / Neutral vs Russian / Ukrainian / Neutral in Articles on Attacks / Humanitarian Impact

Article coverage was measure by paragraph-level analysis, categorising each paragraph as Israeli / Palestinian / Russian / Ukrainian percentage when containing official statements, civilian impacts, military operations, casualty reports, security concerns, grievances, or national policy positions, versus neutral when presenting factual descriptions, third-party observations, historical context, or unattributed damage reports.

All articles in the Gaza and Ukraine datasets describing attacks or humanitarian conditions in Gaza and Ukraine have been evaluated. An LLM classifier was used to pre-filter articles relating to attacks or humanitarian conditions.

LLM Classification Methodology #18 - Justification of Israeli / Russian military actions in Articles on Attacks / Humanitarian Impact

Articles were examined for explicit or implicit justifications of military actions by Israel or Russia. Any mention of retaliation, revenge, self-defence, security concerns, or reference to prior attacks qualifies as justification, regardless of source.

All articles in the Gaza and Ukraine datasets describing attacks or humanitarian conditions in Gaza and Ukraine have been evaluated. An LLM classifier was used to pre-filter articles relating to attacks or humanitarian conditions.

LLM Classification Methodology #19 - Challenges to Justifications of Israeli / Russian military actions in Articles on Attacks / Humanitarian Impact

Articles were examined for explicit challenges to the justifications identified in classification #12. Only direct refutations of the stated rationale are counted, such as factual contradictions, legal disputes, or eyewitness accounts that specifically negate the justification. General criticism or condemnations without explicit refutation of the stated justification are not counted. Challenges can come from any source, including officials, NGOs, or witnesses.

All articles in the Gaza and Ukraine war datasets with Challenges to Justification of Israeli / Russian military actions (LLM classification #18) have been evaluated.

LLM Classification Methodology #20 - Victim Sympathy in Articles on Attacks / Humanitarian Impact - Gaza / Ukraine

Articles were examined for Palestinian/Ukrainian victim references and assessed for sympathetic framing through emotional testimonials (e.g., 'recounted through tears'), personal characterisations (e.g., 'thoughtful and kind'), or humanising details about victims (e.g., age, family information, personal stories). Clinical or impersonal phrasing, focusing solely on numbers or maintaining a detached tone, indicates absence of or minimal sympathy.

All articles in the Gaza and Ukraine datasets describing attacks or humanitarian conditions in Gaza and Ukraine have been evaluated. An LLM classifier was used to pre-filter articles relating to attacks or humanitarian conditions.

“THIS POWERFUL RESEARCH BY THE CENTRE FOR MEDIA MONITORING EXPOSES HOW, DURING ISRAEL’S WAR ON GAZA, THE BBC CONSISTENTLY PRIORITISED ISRAELI PAIN AND PERSPECTIVE - AT THE EXPENSE OF PALESTINIAN LIVES AND VOICES.

THE BBC SHOULD HAVE DONE BETTER IN QUESTIONING ISRAELI TALKING POINTS AND IN HOLDING OUR OWN GOVERNMENT TO ACCOUNT FOR ITS LACK OF IMPLEMENTATION OF UK POLICY ON ISRAEL AND PALESTINE. AS A PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTER, IT HAS NOT READ THE MOOD OF THE PUBLIC EITHER.

THIS IS NO CHERRY-PICKED CRITIQUE. IT IS A COMPREHENSIVE, EVIDENCE-BASED INDICTMENT THAT CANNOT BE IGNORED.

IF THE BBC IS TO MAINTAIN ANY CLAIM TO IMPARTIALITY, IT MUST NOW ENGAGE SERIOUSLY WITH THESE FINDINGS AND THE RECOMMENDATIONS THAT FOLLOW.”

Rt Hon Baroness Warsi PC

BBC ON GAZA-ISRAEL:

ONE STORY, DOUBLE STANDARDS

2023-24

This comprehensive study examines the BBC's coverage of Israel's war on Gaza. It examines whether the BBC has fulfilled its duty to provide balanced, contextual reporting that helps British audiences understand the conflict's complexities. From the dehumanisation of Palestinian suffering to the omission of crucial historical context, this report documents how editorial choices have shaped public understanding of a conflict that has claimed over 50,000 Palestinian and 1,200 Israeli lives.

This study analyses over 35,000 pieces of content through advanced computational methods and detailed qualitative research. Using Large Language Model classification of BBC output from 7 October 2023 to 6 October 2024, alongside extensive case studies extending into 2025, the report reveals systematic patterns in how Britain's public service broadcaster has reported on one of the most consequential conflicts of recent times. The analysis compares the BBC's treatment of Palestinian and Israeli perspectives, casualty reporting, language choices, and adherence to its Charter obligations of impartiality.

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